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Martin Durrell

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Martin Durrell is Emeritus Professor of German at the University of Manchester, UK.

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Hammer's GERMAN Grammar and Usage

sixth edition

Martin Durrell

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Abbreviations and points for the user

Points

- 1 Lists of words are in general alphabetical, unless it appeared more helpful to the user to present them in a different order.
- 2 Where required, the plural of a noun is indicated within brackets after the noun, e.g. *das Lager* (-), i.e. *die Lager*; *der Hut* (ˈe), i.e. *die Hüte*, etc. (-en, -en) or (-n, -n) indicate a weak masculine noun, e.g. *der Mensch*, *des Menschen*, *die Menschen* (see 1.3.2).
- 3 If necessary, a stressed syllable in a word is indicated by the mark placed before the stressed syllable, and/or by the use of bold type, e.g. *die Dok**P**toren*, *unter**P**schreiben*. Where it is required, a stressed word in context is shown by underlining, e.g. *Wie bist du denn gekommen?*
- 4 Sentences used for illustration which are ungrammatical in German are indicated by an asterisk, e.g. **Jedoch dann ist er nicht gekommen*.
- 5 Grammatical terms given in small capitals at the beginning of the relevant chapter or section are explained in the glossary.

Abbreviations

In principle, abbreviations have been kept to a minimum. The following have been used where required by considerations of space.

abbrev.	abbreviated
acad.	academic
A., acc.	accusative

adj.	adjective
arch.	archaic
Au., Austr.	Austrian
aux.	auxiliary
Bav.	Bavarian
ch.	chapter
cl.	clause
coll.	colloquial
conj.	conjunction
D., dat.	dative
elev.	elevated
esp.	especially
etw.	etwas
fem.	feminine
form.	formal
G., gen.	genitive
hist.	historical
indic.	indicative
inf.	informal
jd.	jemand
jdm.	jemandem
jdn.	jemanden
lang.	language
lit.	literary
masc.	masculine
N., nom.	nominative
neut.	neuter
N.G., N. Ger.	North German
obs.	obsolete
occ.	occasionally
o.s.	oneself
part.	participle
pej.	pejorative

pl.	plural
prep.	preposition
reg.	regional
S.G., S. Ger.	South German
sb.	somebody
sg., sing.	singular
sub. cl.	subordinate clause
sth.	something
Sw.	Switzerland, Swiss
techn.	technical
vb.	verb
vulg.	vulgar

Preface to the sixth edition

The fifth edition of *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage* which appeared in 2011 was subsequently taken over by Routledge, and the new publisher undertook a comprehensive survey of users of the work at schools and universities in Britain and the USA. The comments and suggestions they kindly provided prompted a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the structure and organization of the work which has resulted in this new edition. In previous editions I had been concerned to retain the basic format with only minor changes to the numbering and content of individual sections in order to facilitate cross-reference between editions. It was clear that this was not a major issue for users of the work, and for this edition I have undertaken a number of alterations in the interest of consistency and coherence, as well as to improve the accessibility of the material. Thus, the separate chapters on 'Comparison of adjectives and adverbs' and 'Expressions of time', which had in practice been retained from A.E. Hammer's original edition of 1971 on the basis of unjustified assumptions about user preferences, have been eliminated and their content placed in more appropriate sections, so that, for example, all the information on the use of an individual preposition is now in one place rather than in separate sections. In addition, following suggestions by the users, more tables have been provided, and as far as possible the most important information in each chapter is summarized at the start of the chapter, together with particulars on where further detail on specific features can be found within the chapter. This restructuring has also necessitated a complete revision of the index.

Like all previous revisions, this revision is founded on the basic principle that the work should be a comprehensive descriptive account of modern German for the use of the advanced learner or student of the language whose first language is English – or who can approach German through English, since I am aware that

the book has been widely used in other countries. This aim implies that it should cover the whole gamut of variation in usage within modern German, not simply the most prestigious written form which is still, unfortunately, used too exclusively in many teaching manuals, even when they purport to present examples of spoken language. Thus, considerable attention has been paid to giving information on usage in registers other than formal writing or literature, and details given on everyday speech. This also reflects the greater emphasis paid to oral skills, both active and passive, in modern language teaching. The distinction between common spoken usage and the norms of formal writing is particularly marked in German, and clear indications are given in this work as to where spoken and written usage diverge, as also in respect of forms which, although they are considered to be grammatically 'correct', are felt to be stilted outside formal writing (and sometimes even there). Similarly, forms which are frequently heard in everyday speech but widely thought of as non-standard or incorrect are included here, as the foreign learner will encounter them every day, but with a clear indication of their status. Important regional variants within standard German are also included and marked accordingly, especially those commonly found in Swiss or Austrian usage, but purely dialectal forms have been ignored. The basic intention is that a learner encountering an unfamiliar structure or feature should be able to consult the work in order to establish its status in the modern language.

Aside from the changes to the structure of the work mentioned above, the opportunity has been taken, as with all previous revisions, to check the detail of all entries and ensure that all statements about correct usage are as accurate as possible. To this end any dated or inadequate examples have been replaced and all the information about specific points of grammar and usage has been checked fully against my own database of modern German, the most recent academic research (as reflected – necessarily selectively – in the bibliography) and the extensive DeReKo corpus of spoken and written German at the Institut für Deutsche Sprache in Mannheim. This invaluable resource has grown exponentially since the preparation of the first revision – from some two million words in the early eighties to some 30 billion at the end of 2015 – and it is available online at www.ids-mannheim.de. It is naturally complemented now by

the material which can be accessed through internet search engines, and these have also been used extensively – although with the appropriate degree of care, since they are not necessarily representative of widespread usage. Nevertheless, these sources can be invaluable in tracing and attesting some of the most recent developments in the language which are unlikely to find their way into conventional print media, notably demonstrating the continued vitality of the language in incorporating recent lexical material – often, although not only, from English. Thus, *die SMS* (in Austria *das SMS*) ‘text message’ has given a verb *sim sen*, which is then adapted through the whole range of possible derivations to give *aussimsen*, *ersimsen*, *versimsen*, and many more. Information about such possibilities is given in [Chapter 20](#).

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My debt to others in the preparation of this and previous revisions is huge, and I am immensely grateful, first, to all the native speakers of German, unfortunately too numerous to mention, who have answered questions, given advice and, often unwittingly, provided me with examples and other linguistic data. No little thanks are due, too, to generations of students in Manchester, London and Edmonton, since much of the detail in this book was assembled in an attempt to answer their questions and enquiries about German. Many friends, colleagues and acquaintances in Britain, Germany and many other countries – some, sadly, no longer with us – have also assisted me over the years in preparing this and previous editions, and I must express my thanks to all of them, notably to Prof. W. Abraham, Ms E. Adelseck, Prof. V. Ágel, Prof. J.O. Askedal, Prof. A. Auer, Dr J.S. Barbour, Ms S. Bayer, Dr C. Beedham, Dr P. Bennett, Prof. D. Brée, Dr W. Brockhaus-Grand, Dr E.-M. Broomer, Mr P.A. Coggle, Prof. P. Colliander, Dr P. Cook, Prof. M. Dalmas, Dr W.V. Davies, Mr T. Despositos, Prof. D. Dobrovolsky, Dr B. Donaldson, Dr D. Duckworth, Prof. L. Eichinger, Prof. P. Eisenberg, Prof. S. Elspaß, Prof. A. Ensslin, Prof. C. Fandrych, Dr C. Fehringer, Dr K. Fischer, Prof. J.L. Flood, Prof. A. Gardt, Prof. S. Günthner, Dr P. Gupta, Prof. C. Gutknecht, Prof. C. Hall, Mr W. Hanson, Dr G. Hens, Mr P. Holgate, Mr D.H.R. Jones, Prof. R. Jones, Prof. W.J. Jones, Ms C. Kaiser, Prof. E. Knipf-Komlósi, Prof. K.M. Kohl, Ms A. Krawanja, Prof. E. Lang, Prof. N. Langer, Prof. O. Leirbukt, Prof. E. Leiss, Mrs G. Loftus, Dr J. Manton, Dr G.D.C. Martin, Dr V. Martin, Mr D.G. McCulloch, Prof. N. McLelland, Prof. U. Meinhof, Dr M. Minden, Dr K. Neuhaus, Prof. E. Neuland, Prof. H. Ridley, Prof. J. Roche, Prof. D. Rösler, Dr S. Scheible, Ms M. Schwab, Dr A. Scott, Dr R.W. Sheppard, Prof. H.G. Siefken, Prof. P. Stevenson, Prof. G. Stickel, Dr P. Storjohann, Ms S. Tebbutt, Mrs E. Teubert, Prof. J.K.A. Thomanek, Mrs A. Thompson, Dr B. Thompson, Prof. M.R. Townson, Mr B.A. Watson, Dr S. Watts, Prof. H. Wegener, Dr J. West, Dr R.J. Whitt, Prof. D.N.

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Martin Durrell

Manchester, 2016

The phonetic alphabet

On those occasions (especially in [Chapter 21](#)) where it is necessary to indicate precise pronunciation the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) is used. The following table gives all the IPA symbols used in this book, with examples from German, (British) English or French. Phonetic symbols are conventionally given between square brackets, e.g. *Mann*, pronounced [man]. Long vowels are indicated by the symbol : placed after the vowel sign.

Vowels

i:	Ger <i>bieten</i> , Engl <i>beat</i>	u:	Ger <i>Kuh</i> , Fr <i>trou</i>
ɪ	Ger <i>bitten</i> , Engl <i>bit</i>	ʏ	Ger <i>Fülle</i>
e:	Ger <i>beten</i> , Fr <i>écouter</i>	y:	Ger <i>Mühle</i> , Fr <i>mur</i>
ɛ	Ger <i>Bett</i> , Engl <i>bed</i>	œ	Ger <i>Hölle</i>
ɛ:	Ger <i>wäre</i> , Fr <i>scène</i>	ø	Ger <i>Höhle</i> , Fr <i>peu</i>
a	Ger <i>Band</i> , Fr <i>pas</i>	aɪ	Ger <i>fein</i> , Engl <i>fine</i>
a:	Ger <i>Vater</i> , Engl <i>father</i>	aʊ	Ger <i>Maus</i> , Engl <i>mouse</i>
ɔ	Ger <i>kommen</i> , Engl <i>hot</i>	œʏ	Ger <i>Mäuse</i>
o:	Ger <i>Boot</i> , Fr <i>eau</i>	ə	Ger <i>bitte</i> , Engl <i>china</i>
ʊ	Ger <i>Butter</i> , Engl <i>butcher</i>	ɐ	Ger <i>bitter</i>

Consonants

Ger <i>passen</i> , Engl <i>pass</i>	Ger <i>schießen</i> , Engl <i>sheet</i>
--------------------------------------	---

p	Ger <i>bitte</i> , Engl <i>bit</i>	f	Ger <i>Buch</i> , Scots <i>loch</i>
b	Ger <i>tun</i> , Engl <i>ton</i>	x	Ger <i>mich</i> , Engl <i>Hugh</i>
t	Ger <i>dumm</i> , Engl <i>dumb</i>	ç	Ger <i>holen</i> , Engl <i>hole</i>
d	Ger <i>kommen</i> , Engl <i>come</i>	h	Ger <i>mich</i> , Engl <i>mine</i>
k	Ger <i>gut</i> , Engl <i>good</i>	m	Ger <i>neun</i> , Engl <i>nine</i>
g	Ger <i>faul</i> , Engl <i>foul</i>	n	Ger <i>hing</i> , Engl <i>hung</i>
f	Ger <i>wann</i> , Engl <i>van</i>	î	Ger <i>laut</i> , Engl <i>loud</i>
v	Ger <i>lassen</i> , Engl <i>sat</i>	l	Ger <i>rot</i>
s	Ger <i>saß</i> , Engl <i>zero</i>	ʀ	Ger <i>ja</i> , Engl <i>year</i>
z		j	

1

Nouns

NOUNS are words which name living creatures, things, places, ideas or processes. A striking feature of German is that they are always written with an initial capital letter (see 21.2). A noun is often preceded by an ARTICLE or other DETERMINER (see Chapters 4 and 5), and often also by one or more ADJECTIVES or a longer adjectival phrase (see Chapter 6). Together, these form the NOUN PHRASE, illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 The noun phrase: nouns

Determiner	Adjective/adjectival phrase	Noun
die ein unser	flottes seit vorgestern vermisster	Gott Erde Auto Hund

In German there are **three** grammatical categories which are relevant for nouns:

- GENDER: whether the noun is MASCULINE, FEMININE or NEUTER

(section 1.1 gives detailed information about noun gender)

- NUMBER: whether the noun is SINGULAR or PLURAL

(section 1.2 shows how nouns form their plurals and explains some uses of the plural)

- CASE: how the noun shows its function in the sentence

(section 1.3 explains the noun endings which show ACCUSATIVE, DATIVE or GENITIVE case)

1.1 Noun gender

Every German noun belongs to one of the three genders: MASCULINE, FEMININE or NEUTER.

Grammatical GENDER is a system for classifying nouns. It is not the same as 'natural' gender (i.e. 'males', 'females' and 'things', as in English), and for this reason the names of the genders in German are rather misleading and the classification can seem arbitrary to English learners, especially as words for 'things' can have any gender:

MASCULINE: **der** Tisch FEMININE: **die** Wand NEUTER: **das** Fenster

Gender differences are only relevant in the singular of nouns in German, not the plural:

die Tische, **die** Wände, **die** Fenster

Foreign learners are usually recommended to learn German nouns together with the definite article which shows the gender: **der** Tisch, **die** Wand, **das** Fenster. This is still an ideal method, but in practice the form (especially the ending) of a noun or its meaning often gives a useful clue to its gender, as does the way the plural is formed. The gender of about 80% of German nouns can be predicted in this way, and knowing these clues (even if there are some exceptions) helps with learning and remembering the gender of nouns. This section shows first:

- How **gender** can be recognized from the **form** of a noun

([Tables 1.2](#) and [1.3](#) and sections 1.1.1–1.1.2)

- How **gender** can be predicted from the **meaning** of a noun

([Table 1.4](#) and sections 1.1.3–1.1.6)

The remainder of this section gives some more detailed information relating to the gender of nouns:

- Nouns referring to **humans** and **animals** – some **special cases** (section 1.1.7)
- The gender of **compound words** and **abbreviations** (section 1.1.8)
- The gender of **loan-words from English** (section 1.1.9)
- Nouns with **varying** or **double gender** (sections 1.1.10–1.1.11)
- Problems with **gender agreement** (section 1.1.12)

1.1.1 Noun gender and endings

The gender of many nouns can be recognized from their form. In particular, most noun endings (especially DERIVATIONAL SUFFIXES, see section 20.2.1) are invariably linked with a particular gender, as summarized in [Table 1.2](#).

[Table 1.2](#) Gender and endings

Masculine endings			
-ant	der Konsonant	-ismus	der Sozialismus
-ast	der Kontrast	-ling	der Schmetterling
-ich	der Teppich	-or	der Motor
-ig	der Honig	-us	der Rhythmus
Feminine endings			
-a	die Pizza	-keit	die Herrlichkeit
-anz	die Eleganz	-schaft	die Herrschaft
-ei	die Bücherei	-sion	die Explosion
-enz	die Existenz	-tät	die Universität
-heit	die Krankheit	-tion	die Revolution
-ie	die Biologie	-ung	die Bedeutung
-ik	die Politik	-ur	die Natur
-in	die Freundin		
Neuter endings			

-chen	das Mädchen	-sel	das Rätsel
-lein	das Büchlein	-tel	das Viertel
-ma	das Drama	-tum	das Eigentum
-ment	das Appartement	-um	das Album

There are very few common exceptions to these rules. These are:

- for the masculine endings: *das Labor*, *das Genus* ‘gender’ , *das Tempus* ‘tense’.
- for the feminine endings: *das Sofa*, *das Genie*, *der Atlantik*, *der Pazifik*, *das Mosaik*, *das Abitur*, *das Futur*, *das Purpur*.
- for the neuter endings: *die Firma*, *der Streusel*, *der Irrtum*, *der Reichtum*, *der Konsum*
- Chemical terms in - *in* (pronounced [i : n]) are neuter: *das Benzin*, *das Protein*.

1.1.2 Other clues to noun gender given by the form of the noun

The form of some other nouns gives a clue to the gender, as summarized in [Table 1.3](#), and it is helpful to be aware of these, although it is often a matter of tendency rather than firm rule, and the common exceptions given in the later paragraphs in this section need to be noted.

[Table 1.3](#) Other clues to noun gender by form

Most nouns formed from strong verbs without a suffix (but often with a vowel change) are masculine	der Betrieb, der Bruch, der Fall, der Gang, der Sprung
Most nouns ending in -t from verbs are feminine	die Ankunft, die Fahrt, die Flucht, die Sicht
Nouns in -el , -er and -en are predominantly (60%) masculine	der Flügel, der Fehler, der Schatten

Nouns in -e are mainly (90%) feminine	die Blume, die Bühne, die Garage, die Liebe
Nouns with the prefix Ge- are mainly (90%) neuter	das Gebäude, das Gebirge, das Gesetz, das Gespräch
Nouns with the suffixes -nis and -sal are mainly neuter (about two-thirds)	das Bedürfnis, das Ereignis, das Zeugnis, das Schicksal
Monosyllabic nouns are predominantly (60%) masculine	der Arm, der Fuß, der Lärm, der Punkt, der Schuh

Further details on these groups:

(a) Nouns formed from strong verbs without a suffix are masculine

These often have a change in the vowel:

der Beginn, der Betrieb, der Biss, der Bruch, der Dreh, der Einlass, der Ersatz, der Fall, der Gang,
der Griff, der Halt, der Klang, der Sprung, der Treff, der Verdruss, der Vortrag, der Wurf, der Zug

There are a few common exceptions: *das Grab, das Leid, das Maß, das Schloss, das Verbot.*

(b) Most nouns ending in -t from verbs are feminine

die Ankunft, die Fahrt, die Flucht, die Gunst, die Last, die Macht, die Schlacht, die Schrift, die Sicht

Common exceptions are: *der Dienst, der Durst, der Frost, der Verdienst, der*

Verlust; das Gift.

(c) Nouns in *-el*, *-en* and *-er* are predominantly masculine

i.e. 60% of those in *-el* and *-er*, but 80% of those in *-en* (as no feminine nouns end in *en*):

der Balken, der Fehler, der Flügel, der Körper, der Schatten, der Tunnel

Nouns in *-er* from verbs (see 20.2.1d) are **masculine**: *der Bäcker, der Bohrer, der Lehrer* (in any case, many of these denote male humans). The other nouns which are not masculine fall into four groups:

- (i) Nouns from verb infinitives in *-en* are neuter (see 1.1.6e): *das Essen, das Kaffeetrinken*.
- (ii) About 25% of those in *-el* and *-er* are feminine: *die Butter, die Regel, die Wurzel*.
- (iii) Nouns in *-sel* and *-tel* are neuter (see 1.1.1): *das Rätsel, das Viertel, das Achtel*.
- (iv) Other nouns in *-el*, *-en* and *-er* (about 15%) are neuter: *das Segel, das Zeichen, das Fieber*.

(d) Nouns in *-e* are mainly (90%) feminine

die Biene, die Blume, die Bühne, die Garage, die Gruppe, die Lerche, die Reihe, die Sahne

There are five major groups of exceptions:

- (i) The ‘weak’ masculines which are names of male persons and animals** (see 1.3.2):

der Affe, der Bote, der Junge, der Löwe

- (ii) Nine irregular masculines** (see 1.3.3):

der Buchstabe, der Friede, der Funke, der Gedanke, der Glaube, der Haufe,
der Name, der Same, der Wille

(iii) Two other masculine nouns:

der Charme, der Käse

(iv) Most nouns with the prefix *Ge* - are neuter, even if they end in - *e*
(see 1.1.2e):

das Gebirge, das Gefälle, das Gemüse

(v) A few other neuter nouns. The most frequent are:

das Auge, das Ende, das Erbe *inheritance* (see 1.1.11), das Finale, das Image,
das Interesse, das Prestige, das Regime

(e) Most nouns with the prefix *Ge* - [gə] are neuter

Many of these end in -*e*, but in this case it is the prefix (see 20.2.2b) which points to the gender:

das Gebäude, das Gebirge, das Gebot, das Gelübde, das Gemüse, das Gesetz, das Gespräch

There are a few exceptions, which fall into three groups:

(i) Names of male or female humans:

der Gehilfe/die Gehilfin	<i>assistant</i>
der Gemahl/die Gemahlin (<i>elev.</i>)	<i>spouse</i>
der Genosse/die Genossin	<i>comrade</i>
der Gevatter (<i>arch.</i>)	<i>godfather</i>

(ii) Eleven other masculines:

der Gebrauch	<i>use</i>	der Gehorsam	<i>obedience</i>	der Geschmack	<i>taste</i>
der Gedanke	<i>thought</i>	der Genuss	<i>enjoyment</i>	der Gestank	<i>stink</i>
der Gefallen	<i>favour</i>	der Geruch	<i>smell</i>	der Gewinn	<i>profit</i>
der Gehalt	<i>content</i>	der Gesang	<i>singing</i>		

Gefallen and *Gehalt* are neuter in other meanings, see 1.1.11.

(iii) Eleven other feminines:

die Gebärde	<i>gesture</i>	die Gefahr	<i>danger</i>	die Gestalt	<i>figure</i>
die Gebühr	<i>fee</i>	die Gemeinde	<i>community</i>	die Gewähr	<i>guarantee</i>
die Geburt	<i>birth</i>	die Geschichte	<i>history; story</i>	die Gewalt	<i>force, violence</i>
die Geduld	<i>patience</i>	die Geschwulst	<i>tumour</i>		

(f) Nouns with the suffixes - *nis* and - *sal* are mainly (about two-thirds) neuter

das Bedürfnis, das Ereignis, das Ergebnis, das Erlebnis, das Gedächtnis, das Geheimnis,
das Hindernis, das Verhältnis, das Verständnis, das Zeugnis; das Scheusal, das Schicksal

About a third are feminine, e.g.:

die Besorgnis, die Erkenntnis, die Erlaubnis, die Ersparnis, die Kenntnis, die Wildnis, die Mühsal

In particular, nouns in - *nis* from adjectives are mainly feminine, e.g. die Bitternis, die Finsternis

(g) Nouns with some endings of foreign origin are mostly neuter if they refer to things

-al	das Lineal	-at	das Sekretariat	-iv	das Adjektiv
-an	das Organ	-ent	das Talent	-o	das Büro
-ar	das Formular	-ett	das Etikett	-on	das Mikrophon
-är	das Militär	-ier	das Papier		

Nouns with these endings referring to persons are masculine, and there are a few other common exceptions:

der Altar, der Apparat, der Automat, der Kanal, der Kanton, der Kommentar,

die Manier, die Moral, die Person, der Salat, der Senat, der Skandal

(h) Nouns of one syllable are predominantly masculine

Most of the remaining nouns of German are words of one syllable. In practice, the gender of these is best learned by heart, but it is always worth bearing in mind how these nouns are distributed between the three genders, i.e.:

- **67% masculine**, e.g. der Arm, der Lärm, der Punkt, der Schuh
- **19% neuter**, e.g. das Buch, das Dach, das Jahr, das Kinn
- **14% feminine**, e.g. die Angst, die Hand, die Nuss, die Stadt

[Table 1.4](#) Noun gender and meaning

Masculine	
male humans and animals seasons, months, days of the week winds, weather, compass points rocks, minerals alcoholic and plant-based drinks makes of car rivers outside Germany monetary units mountains, mountain ranges	der Arzt, der Hahn, der Löwe, der Bock der Sommer, der Januar, der Montag der Föhn, der Nebel, der Schnee, der Norden der Granit, der Diamant der Gin, der Kakao der BMW, der Audi, der Mercedes der Ganges, der Nil, der Severn der Euro, der Dollar, der Franken der Brocken, der Spessart
Feminine	
female humans and animals aeroplanes, motorbikes, ships rivers in German-speaking countries names of numerals	die Frau, die Henne, die Löwin, die Sau die Boeing, die BMW, die „Bismarck“ die Aare, die Oder, die Spree, die Weser die Eins, die Vier, die Milliarde
Neuter	
young humans and animals metals, chemicals, scientific units letters of the alphabet, musical notes other parts of speech used as	das Baby, das Kind, das Ferkel, das Lamm das Gold, das Eisen, das Aspirin, das Volt das A, das Ypsilon, ein großes D, das hohe C das Stehen, das Aber, das moderne Deutsch das „Hilton“, das „Kranzler“, das „Kapitol“

nouns hotels, cafés, restaurants, cinemas continents, countries, towns	das alte Europa, das neue Polen, das geteilte Berlin
---	--

1.1.3 Noun gender and meaning

There are many nouns whose gender is determined by their meaning. The most important of these regularities are summarized in [Table 1.4](#), and further details are given in sections 1.1.4–1.1.6.

In this context, it should be noted that determination of gender by form almost invariably overrides determination by meaning, so that, for example, *das Mädchen* is neuter because words with the suffix *-chen* are neuter without exception.

1.1.4 Masculine nouns by meaning

(a) Male persons and male animals (see also 1.1.7)

der Arzt, der Ingenieur, der König, der Student, der Vater, der Bock, der Eber, der Hahn

(b) Seasons, months and days of the week

der Frühling, der Sommer, der Herbst, der Januar, der Mai, der Mittwoch, der Sonnabend

However, compounds have the gender of the second element (see 1.1.8), e.g. *das Frühjahr*, *die Jahreszeit*.

(c) Points of the compass and words referring to winds and kinds of weather

der Norden, der Osten, der Süden, der Westen

der Föhn, der Passat, der Taifun, der Wind

der Frost, der Hagel, der Nebel, der Regen, der Schnee, der Sturm, der Tau

There are a few frequent exceptions: *die Brise, das Eis, das Wetter*.

(d) Rocks and minerals

der Diamant, der Granit, der Lehm, der Quarz, der Ton

Common exceptions: *das Erz, die Kohle, die Kreide, das Mineral*.

(e) Alcoholic and plant-based drinks

der Cocktail, der Gin, der Kirsch, der Schnaps, der Wein, der Wodka
der Kakao, der Kaffee, der Most, der Saft, der Tee

A notable exception is *das Bier*.

(f) Makes of car

der Audi, der BMW, der Citroën, der Polo, der Rolls- Royce, der Trabant

(g) Rivers outside Germany

der Ganges, der Jordan, der Kongo, der Mississippi, der Nil, der Po, der Shannon, der Severn

However, those ending in - *a* or - *e* are usually feminine, e.g. *die Seine, die Themse, die Wolga*, as is *die Liffey*.

(h) Monetary units

der Cent, der Dollar, der Euro, der Franken, der Pfennig, der Rappen, der Schilling

There are several exceptions, notably *die Mark, das Pfund*.

(i) Mountains and mountain ranges

der Ätna, der Brocken, der Montblanc, der Mount Everest, der Säntis
der Balkan, der Harz, der Himalaja, der Jura, der Spessart, der Taunus

There are some common exceptions, notably compounds like *das Erzgebirge, das Matterhorn, die Zugspitze* as well as some others, e.g. *die Eifel, die Haardt, die Rhön, die Sierra Nevada*.

1.1.5 Feminine nouns by meaning

(a) Female persons and animals

die Frau, die Gans, die Henne, die Kuh, die Mutter, die Sau, die Tante

Notable exceptions are the archaic or derogatory *das Weib* as well as diminutives in - *chen* and -*lein* like *das Fräulein* (nowadays largely obsolete) and *das Mädchen*. The recent loan-word *das Girl* (see 1.1.9) is probably neuter by analogy with *das Mädchen*.

(b) Aeroplanes, motorbikes and ships

die Airbus A320, die Boeing 737, die Cessna, die Tu-154
die BMW, die Honda
die „Bismarck“, die „Bremen“

However, names of aeroplanes and ships often keep the gender of the base word, e.g. *der Airbus, der Storch; der „Albatros“, das „Möwchen“*.

(c) Native German names of rivers

This includes many rivers in regions of Central or Eastern Europe where German has been widely spoken in the past but which are nowadays not in Germany, Austria or Switzerland.

die Donau, die Elbe, die Ems, die Fulda, die Isar, die Lahn, die Maas, die Memel, die Moldau,
die Mosel, die Neiße, die Oder, die Ruhr, die Saale, die Spree, die Weichsel, die Werra, die Weser

There are a few important exceptions: *der Inn, der Lech, der Main, der Neckar, der Rhein*.

(d) Names of numerals

die Eins, die Vier, die Tausend, die Million, die Milliarde

Note, as quantity expressions: *das Dutzend, das Hundert, das Tausend* (see 8.1.5b).

1.1.6 Neuter nouns by meaning

(a) Young persons and animals

das Baby, das Ferkel, das Fohlen, das Junge (but see 1.1.11), das Kalb, das Kind, das Lamm

(b) Metals and chemical elements

das Blei, das Eisen, das Gold, das Kobalt, das Kupfer, das Messing, das Uran, das Zinn

Common exceptions: *die Bronze, der Phosphor, der Schwefel, der Stahl*, and compounds like *der Sauerstoff*.

(c) Scientific units

das Ampere, das Atom, das Elektron, das Molekül, das Pfund, das Volt, das Watt

Liter and *Meter* can be masculine *or* neuter, see 1.1.10b.

(d) Letters of the alphabet and musical notes

das A, ein großes D, das Ypsilon
das hohe C, das Cis, das Ges

In Swiss usage letters are masculine, e.g. *der A*.

(e) Other parts of speech used as nouns

This includes, most importantly, verb infinitives (see 11.4), e.g.:

das Benehmen, das Fussballspielen, das Inkrafttreten, das Kommen, das Zeitunglesen

as well as all other parts of speech:

das Ach, das Durcheinander, das vertraute Du, das Jenseits, sein ewiges Nein

This group also comprises colours, languages (see also 6.2.4), and English - *ing* forms:

das Blau des Himmels, das österreichische Deutsch, das Meeting

(f) Hotels, cafés, restaurants and cinemas

das Hilton, das „Kranzler“, das „Roxy“

(g) Names of companies with no article

In practice the gender only becomes apparent with pronouns or determiners in agreement:

Samsung weist darauf hin, dass **seine** *Samsung points out that its Smart TVs*

Smart-TVs dank Spracherkennung
private Gespräche mitschneiden können
(Zeit)

*can record private conversations by
means of language recognition
software*

Less frequently, these names are used with feminine agreement, e.g. *Nokia hat ihre Umsatzprognose geändert.*

(h) Names of continents, countries, provinces, towns and cities

For the use of the article with these neuter names, see 4.4.1c.

das gärende Afrika, das viktorianische England, das wilhelminische Deutschland,
das alte Bayern, das zerstörte Frankfurt, das historische Neustadt (*despite*: die Stadt)

There are two groups of exceptions to this rule:

(i) Several feminines, i.e.:

die Arktis, die Antarktis; die Lausitz, die Pfalz, die Schweiz

and those ending in *-a*, *-e*, *-ei* or *-ie* (except *Afrika*, *China*), e.g.:

die Riviera, die Bretagne, die Türkei, die Normandie

(ii) A few masculines (used with the definite article, see 4.4.1a):

der Irak, der Iran, der Jemen, der Kongo, der Libanon, der Sudan

The names of these countries are also sometimes used as neuter nouns, with no article, e.g. *die beunruhigende politische Situation in Irak*, *das anscheinend im Chaos zu versinken droht*. This is now the form officially preferred by the German *Auswärtiges Amt*. However, everyday usage has so far kept to the traditional norm of masculine gender, with the article.

1.1.7 The gender of nouns for humans and animals: special cases

(a) Feminine forms of nouns denoting professions, occupations or nationality, etc.

For many names denoting professions, occupations or nationality the basic designation is masculine, and a feminine can be formed from it with the suffix -*in* (see 20.2.1f):

der Engländer – die Engländer **in** der Türke – die Türk **in**

der Koch – die Köch **in** der Lehrer – die Lehrer **in**

or by replacing - *mann* with - *frau*, e.g.:

der Fachmann – die Fach **frau** der Geschäftsmann – die Geschäfts **frau**

These forms are used where appropriate to refer to female persons:

Sie gilt als die beste Kundin von unserem Geschäft	<i>She is considered our best customer</i>
Heute Abend habe ich deine Freundin Anna gesehen	<i>I saw your friend Anna this evening</i>

(b) Present-day usage of feminine forms

The use of feminine forms, especially those in -*in*, has given rise to much controversy and it is in practice variable and uncertain nowadays. Using undifferentiated masculine nouns, e.g. *Alle **Studenten** sind herzlich eingeladen* or *Alle deutschen **Politiker** haben diese Meinung geteilt* to refer to both men and women, can be considered discriminatory, although it is quite frequent and usual. In general, though, there is a clear trend nowadays to avoid gender-specification wherever possible, but the alternatives are often tricky or complex and the uncertainty has resulted in much inconsistency in practice. The most frequent modern usage can be summarized as follows:

- (i) The feminine form is used if it is considered relevant in context:

Die neue Lehrer **in** scheint sehr beliebt zu sein

(*Der neue Lehrer* would be odd if the teacher is a woman)

(ii) The feminine forms are usual to refer back to a woman (or women) already mentioned:

Meine beiden Schwestern sind Ärzt **innen** (*not: Ärzte*)

Hanne Frisch, die Ärzt **in** (*not: der Arzt*), die ihn behandelt hatte

Sie wurde die erste Professor **in** an einer deutschen Universität

(iii) The masculine form is sometimes used in a general sense to refer to either sex, especially with titles and 'newer' professions (i.e. those which were previously predominantly or exclusively male), or when the profession itself is emphasized, e.g.:

Sie ist Ingenieur, Autoschlosser, Informatiker

der damalige Minister für Volksbildung Margot Honecker

Frau Professor Dr. Hartmann

This usage is particularly common after the verb *sein*, and it was predominant in the former GDR. However, the use of the feminine suffix is becoming more usual with titles. On the election of Angela Merkel as Federal Chancellor, it was established (after some debate) that the official form of address for her would be *Frau Bundeskanzlerin*.

(iv) The feminine form is the norm if *Frau* is omitted, e.g.:

Bundespräsidentin der Schweiz Doris Leuthard

Ute Hartmann ist **Professorin** für Neuere Deutsche Literatur

(v) In advertisements for jobs, both forms are usually given, often in abbreviated form:

Wir suchen ab sofort **eine(n)**

We have an immediate vacancy

Musiklehrer(in)	<i>for a music teacher</i>
Wir brauchen eine/n Mitarbeiter/-in für Gemeinde- und Jugendarbeit	<i>We require an employee for social and youth work</i>

(vi) When no feminine form is available, the masculine must be used despite the anomaly:

der Säugling hieß Anna

der Teenager war schwanger

unser werter Gast, Frau Dr. Schilling

(vii) In written German, the feminine form in - *in* is sometimes used to refer back to feminine nouns denoting things:

Die ehemalige Sowjetunion war die größte Produzent in von Personenwagen im Ostblock	<i>The former Soviet Union was the largest producer of private cars in the Eastern bloc</i>
--	---

This usage is not obligatory, and the masculine form (e.g. *der größte Produzent*) would be equally acceptable in standard German.

(viii) In the plural, to refer to both men and women, various possibilities are current. It is quite usual for the masculine form to be used:

Der Bürgermeister begrüßte **die Besucher** aus der Hauptstadt Wien

Wir haben die neuen **Nachbarn** noch nicht kennen gelernt

Astrid und Christian sind unsere besten **Freunde**

However, this may be considered discriminatory in certain contexts, especially if the feminine form is in common usage, and both forms are then often given:

liebe Zuschauer und Zuschauerinnen; die Studenten und Studentinnen
dieser Universität

(ix) A recent option in writing is to use the feminine form with a capital *I* (sometimes spoken as long [i:]) to indicate both sexes, although many authorities do not consider this to be standard:

die **StudentInnen** der Westfälischen Wilhelmsuniversität Münster

Although this form is most frequently used in the plural, the singular, e.g. *Student **In***, does occur. However, as there is then uncertainty whether it should be used with *der* or *die*, it tends to be limited to contexts where no article is required, e.g. *Als StudentIn hatte ich selten genug Geld*.

(x) In some cases, the problem can be avoided by using a word which is not gender-specific, if one is available, especially from present participles (see 11.5.1b), e.g. *die Studierenden der Universität Passau*. These are largely restricted to official writing, where they have become quite frequent, but they are rarely used in everyday speech and innovations like *Zu Fuß Gehende* or *Rad Fahrende* are felt by many to be stilted and awkward. However, some non-gender-specific forms are coming into use in colloquial speech, especially abbreviations like *die Studis* ‘students’.

(c) Animals

The names of species of animals can be masculine, feminine or neuter, e.g.:

der Dachs, die Ratte, das Pferd

Many familiar or domesticated animals have distinct masculine and feminine forms:

der Fuchs – die Füchsin der Gänserich – die Gans

der Hahn – die Henne der Kater – die Katze

Usually, one of these designates the species, e.g. *der Fuchs*, *die Gans*, *die Katze* (but note *das Huhn*) and the other is only used if the sex is known or relevant in context. In the absence of a specific term, male or female animals and birds can

be indicated by *das Männchen* or *das Weibchen*, e.g.:

das Zebra **männchen** das Frosch **weibchen**

(d) Anomalous genders of names of human beings

The gender of the following nouns is fixed and used to refer to both men and women:

die Geisel <i>hostage</i>	das Mannequin <i>mannequin</i>	das Mündel <i>ward</i>
das Genie <i>genius</i>	die Memme <i>sissy</i>	die Person <i>person</i>
das Haupt <i>head</i> (of state, family)	der Mensch <i>human being</i>	die Wache <i>sentry</i>
das Individuum <i>individual</i>	das Mitglied <i>member</i>	die Waise <i>orphan</i>

Exceptionally, in legal language **der** Mündel is usual, see 1.1.10, and the gender is different in the phrase *jdn. zum Waisen machen* ‘to make sb. an orphan’.

In addition, all words in *-ling* are masculine and those in *-chen* and *-lein* are neuter, irrespective of natural gender (see 1.1.1), e.g. *der Flüchtling*, *der Zwilling*; *das Söhnchen*, *das Fräulein*, *das Mädchen*.

Problems of agreement if grammatical and natural gender are in conflict are dealt with in 1.1.12.

1.1.8 The gender of compound words and abbreviations

(a) Compound nouns usually have the gender of the last component

der Fahr **plan** die Bushalte **stelle** das Hallen **bad**

There are a few exceptions to this rule:

- (i) Some compounds of *der Mut* are feminine:

die Anmut, die Armut, die Demut, die Großmut, die Langmut, die Sanftmut, die Schwermut, die Wehmut

(ii) For the compounds of *der/das Teil*, see 1.1.10c.

Others:

das Gift	<i>but</i> die Mitgift <i>dowry</i>	die Woche	<i>but</i> der Mittwoch
der Grat	<i>but</i> das Rückgrat	das Wort	<i>but</i> die Antwort
die Scheu	<i>but</i> der Abscheu (see 1.1.10a)		

(b) The gender of abbreviations is determined by the base word

der HSV (der Hamburger Sportverein)
die CDU (die Christlich-Demokratische Union)
das BAFöG (das Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz)

(c) Shortened words have the gender of the full form

der Akku (Akkumulator)	die Lok (Lokomotive)
der Krimi (Kriminalroman)	die Uni (Universität)
das Labor (Laboratorium)	

A common exception is *das Foto*, despite *die Fotografie* (but *die Foto* is usual in Switzerland).

1.1.9 The gender of English loan-words

Large-scale borrowing of words from English is a feature of modern German, and the nouns have to be allocated a gender. This tends to be determined by the following principles (which sometimes conflict, resulting in uncertainty and variation):

(a) Many English words adopt the gender of the nearest German equivalent

der Airbag (der Sack)	die Box (die Büchse)
der Airport (der Flughafen)	die Crew (die Mannschaft)
das Baby (das Kind)	das Girl (das Mädchen)
die Band (die Kapelle)	der Lift (der Aufzug)
das Bike (das Fahrrad)	der Smog (der Nebel)
der Bob (der Schlitten)	der Shop (der Laden)

This principle also applies with pseudo-loans like *das Handy* (by analogy with *das Telefon*). It can sometimes result in a word having two genders in different meanings, e.g. *der Service* 'service' (by analogy with *der Dienst*); *das Service* '(dinner/tea) service' (by analogy with *das Geschirr*).

Following similar principles the gender may also be determined by analogy with the gender of the general term in German, e.g.:

das Hockey, das Rugby, das Tennis (cf **das** *Spiel*)
der Jive, der Rap, der Techno (cf **der** *Tanz*)

(b) The ending or the form of some English words can determine the gender

(i) Words with endings similar to German endings often adopt the gender associated with that ending:

der Beamer, der Container, der Computer, der Oldtimer (- *er* is a masculine ending)

der Konduktor, der Monitor, der Rotor (- *or* is a masculine ending)

die Animation, die Supervision (- *sion* and - *tion* are feminine endings)

die Cleverness, die Fairness, die Wellness (nouns in -*nis* from adjectives are usually feminine)

die City, die Lobby, die Publicity, die Party, die Story (- *ie* is a feminine

ending)

(However, some newer loans in - *ie* or - *y* tend to be neuter, e.g. *das Selfie*, *das Smiley*)

das Klosett, das Pamphlet, das Ticket (- *ett* is a neuter ending)

das Advertisement, das Realignment, das Treatment (- *ment* is a neuter ending)

(ii) Monosyllabic nouns from verbs are often masculine (see 1.1.2a):

der Boom, der Crash, der Deal, der Drink, der Hit, der Hype, der Link, der Look, der Rock

(iii) Nouns from English - *ing* forms are neuter (see 1.1.6e):

das Aquaplaning, das Meeting, das Online-Banking, das Training, das Walking

(iv) Words which are shortened from a longer compound can take the gender of the missing part:

das Au-Pair (-mädchen), die Holding (-company/-gesellschaft), der Intercity (-zug)

Words like these can look like exceptions, as words in ‘-ing’ are normally neuter and *die City* is feminine.

(v) Nouns from prefixed or phrasal verbs can be either masculine or neuter (and several vary):

der Check-up, der Countdown, der Download, der Fallout, der Input, der Knockout, der Take-off

das Blow-up, das Check-in, das Handout, das Hashtag, das Research, das Teach-in, das Upgrade

(c) If there is no other indication, monosyllabic nouns are predominantly masculine

der Chip, der Lunch, der Sex, der Spot, der Trend, der Tweet

However, there are a number of frequent feminines and neuters, e.g.:

die Bar, die Couch, die Farm das Quiz, das Steak, das Team

(d) In many cases no gender has yet become firmly established

Some common examples:

die/das App	der/das Cartoon	der/die Forehand	der/das Poster
der/das Blackout	die/das Cola	der/das Ketchup	der/das Radar
der/das Blog	der/das Event	der/das Laptop	der/das Spam
der/das Break	die/das Flipchart	der/das Movie	der/das Tablet

Sometimes different German countries or regions have a preference for different genders, so that *Match* is *das Match* in Germany and Austria, but *der Match* in Switzerland. *Die E-Mail* (or often simply *die Mail*) is usual in most of Germany (presumably because of *die Post*) but *das (E-)Mail* is common in Switzerland, Austria and much of South Germany.

1.1.10 Nouns with varying gender

The gender of a few nouns is not fixed, although the variation is often linked to regional or register differences.

(a) Some common examples

Abscheu	der (occ. die)	
abhorrence	das (Au. der)	der or das
Backbord	port	der (esp. tech.)

<i>side</i>	der (S.Ger./Au.)	Knäuel <i>ball</i> (wool)	das
Barock <i>Baroque</i>	das	Meteor <i>meteor</i>	das (legal der)
Bonbon <i>sweet</i>	der (occ. das)	Mündel <i>ward</i>	die or das
Dotter <i>yolk</i>	der (occ. das , obs.)	Nutella <i>nutella</i> ®	der or das
Dschungel	die	Pesto <i>pesto</i>	der (Au. das)
<i>jungle</i>	der (occ. das)	Puff <i>brothel</i> (vulg.)	der (Au./Sw. das)
Fakt <i>fact</i>	der (esp. <i>techn.</i> das)	Pyjama <i>pyjamas</i>	das (S.Ger. der)
Filter <i>filter</i>	das (Sw. die)	Sakko <i>jacket</i>	der or (esp. Au.) das
Foto <i>photo</i>	das or der	Sims (window-) <i>sill</i> ,	der or das
Gelee <i>jelly</i>	die (esp. <i>techn.</i> der)	<i>mantelpiece</i>	das (Au. der)
Gulasch <i>goulash</i>	der or (esp. Au.) das	Steuerbord <i>starboard</i>	das (Sw. der)
Joghurt <i>yoghurt</i>	der or das (rare die)	Taxi <i>taxi</i> (NB: <i>also common:</i>	die Taxe)
Katapult	der or das (rare die)	Tüpfel <i>dot</i> (on <i>i</i>)	der (esp. Au. das)
<i>catapult</i>	das or der	Virus <i>virus</i>	der (medic. das)
Kehricht	der or das		
<i>sweepings</i>	der (Au. das)		
Keks <i>biscuit</i>			

(b) *Liter* and *Meter*

Both these words (and their compounds, e.g. *Zentimeter*) are officially neuter, notably in scientific terminology, i.e. *das Liter*, *das Meter*. However, they are regularly masculine in everyday speech, and not infrequently in print, i.e. *der Liter*, *der Meter*. Written Swiss usage **always** prefers the masculine.

(c) *Teil*

Teil is most often masculine, *der Teil*, in all meanings:

dies **er** Teil von Deutschland; er behielt **den** größten Teil für sich

However, it may be neuter in a few set phrases:

ich für **mein** (*or meinen*) Teil; **das bessere** (*or den besseren*) Teil wählen;

sie trug **ihr** (*or ihren*) Teil dazu bei; er hat **sein** (*or seinen*) Teil getan

The neuter *das Teil* is also usual in technical language, to refer to a detached part:

jedes einzelne Teil, ein defektes Teil

Compounds of *Teil* are mostly masculine, e.g. *der Elternteil*, *der Körperteil*, with the following exceptions:

das Abteil *compartment*
das Einzelteil *separate part*
das (*legal der*) Erbteil *inheritance*
das Ersatzteil *replacement part*

das Gegenteil *opposite*
das/der Oberteil *upper part*
das Urteil *verdict*

1.1.11 Two genders with different meanings

A number of words have two meanings differentiated by gender:

der Band (¨e) *volume, book* *die Band* (-s)
(*pron. [bent]*) *band, (pop) group*
der Bulle (-n, -n) *bull; cop* (*coll.*)
der Bund (¨e) *union; waistband*
der Ekel (*no pl.*) *disgust*
der Erbe (-n, -n) *heir*
der Flur (-e) *entrance hall* (N.G.)
der Gefallen (-) *favour*
der Gehalt (-e) *content*
der Golf (-e) *gulf*
der Gummi (-s) *eraser*
der Harz *Harz* (*mountains*)
der Heide (-n, -n) *heathen*

das Band (¨e) *ribbon, tape*
das Band (-e) *bond, fetter* (see 1.2.6)
die Bulle (-n) (*papal*) *bull*
das Bund (-e) *bundle, bunch*
das Ekel (-) (*coll.*) *nasty person*
das Erbe (*no pl.*) *inheritance, heritage*
die Flur (-en) *meadow* (*elev.*)
das Gefallen (*no pl.*) *pleasure*
das Gehalt (¨e) *salary*
das Golf (*no pl.*) *golf*
das Gummi (*no pl.*) *rubber* (*as material*); *rubber band*
das Harz (*no pl.*) *resin*
die Heide (-n) *heath*
die Hut (*no pl.*) *guard* (e.g. *auf der Hut sein* ‘to be on one’s guard’)

der Hut (¨e) <i>hat</i>	das Junge (adj.) <i>young (of animals)</i>
der Junge (-n, -n) <i>boy</i>	die Kiefer (-n) <i>pine</i>
der Kiefer (-) <i>jaw</i>	die Kunde (no pl.) <i>knowledge, news</i> (elev.)
der Kunde (-n, -n) <i>customer</i>	das Lama (-s) <i>llama</i>
der Lama (-s) <i>lama</i>	das Laster (-) <i>vice</i>
der Laster (-) <i>lorry (coll.)</i>	die Leiter (-n) <i>ladder</i>
der Leiter (-) <i>leader</i>	die Mangel (-n) <i>mangle</i>
der Mangel (¨) <i>lack</i>	das Mark (no pl.) <i>marrow (bone)</i>
die Mark (-) <i>mark (coin)</i>	der Marsch (¨e) <i>march</i>
die Marsch (-en) <i>fen, marsh</i>	das Maß (-e) <i>measure</i>
die Maß (-) <i>litre of beer (Bav., Austr.)</i>	das Mensch (-er) <i>slut (coll., pej.)</i>
der Mensch (-en, -en) <i>human being</i>	das Messer (-) <i>knife</i>
der Messer (-) <i>surveyor, gauge</i>	das Militär (no pl.) <i>the military</i>
der Militär (-s) <i>military man</i>	das Moment (-e) <i>(determining) factor</i>
der Moment (-e) <i>moment</i>	die Otter (-n) <i>adder (also: die</i> <i>Kreuzotter)</i>
der Otter (-) <i>otter (also: der Fischotter)</i>	das Pack (no pl.) <i>mob, rabble</i>
der Pack (-e or ¨e) <i>package</i>	das Pony (-s) <i>pony</i>
der Pony (no pl.) <i>fringe (of hair)</i>	das Schild (-er) <i>sign, plate</i>
der Schild (-e) <i>shield</i>	die See (no pl.) <i>sea</i>
der See (-n) <i>lake</i>	das Steuer (-) <i>steering-wheel, helm</i>
die Steuer (-n) <i>tax</i>	das Stift (-e) <i>foundation, home (e.g. for</i> <i>aged)</i>
der Stift (-e) <i>pen, stripling (coll.)</i>	das Tau (-e) <i>rope, hawser</i>
der Tau (no pl.) <i>dew</i>	das Tor (-e) <i>gate</i>
der Tor (-en, -en) <i>fool (lit.)</i>	das Verdienst (-e) <i>merit, achievement</i>
der Verdienst (no pl.) <i>earnings</i>	das Wehr (-e) <i>weir</i>
die Wehr (no pl.) <i>defence</i>	

(i) In Austria, *der Gehalt* is also used in the meaning ‘salary’.

(ii) In colloquial speech, *das Gummi* is used in the meaning ‘eraser’.

1.1.12 Problems of gender agreement

Difficulty with gender agreement arises most often when grammatical gender and natural gender do not correspond, as in the nouns dealt with in 1.1.7.

(a) Pronouns agree with the grammatical gender of the noun, irrespective of natural gender

This is the accepted rule, especially in formal writing:

ein **es** der Mitglieder dieses Vereins
Wir suchen eine männliche Fachkraft. **Sie**
muss im Besitz eines Führerscheins sein
Ich kann mich jedoch an keine Person
erinnern, **die** in dem so benannten Vorort
 wohnte (*Grass*)
Es war einmal ein Mädchen aus Alaska,
das war Sängerin in einem Club in San
Diego. Vor drei Jahren, mit 19, nahm **es**
 seine erste CD auf (*Kurier*)

one of the members of this club
We are looking for a skilled male
worker. He must have a clean driving
 licence
However, I cannot remember any
person who lived in the suburb of that
 name
There was once a girl from Alaska,
she was a singer in a club in San
Diego. Three years ago, at the age of
19, she recorded her first CD

This rule is rarely adhered to consistently. In practice, the relative pronoun almost always agrees for grammatical gender, but personal pronouns often have the form appropriate to the natural gender of the person referred to (i.e. *sie* or *er*), especially in spoken German:

Sie stürzten sich auf das Mädchen, **das** in
der Ecke stand, und drohten **ihr** mit
 Erschießen (*Quick*)
Das Mädchen da drüben? **Sie** hat doch rotes
 Haar!

They rushed upon the girl standing
in the corner and threatened to
shoot her
That girl over there? But she's got
red hair!

Even in writing, natural gender tends to predominate if the pronoun is some distance from the noun it refers to, especially if it is in a different clause or sentence:

Das Mädchen aus Köln ist gestern Abend
angekommen. **Sie** ist sehr liebenswürdig

*The girl from Cologne arrived
last night. She's very kind*

However, there seems to be a clear tendency to prefer the neuter pronoun to refer to younger girls.

Fräulein (if it is still used) is treated in the same way, i.e. as a neuter noun, when it is used on its own, e.g. *das Fräulein, **das** ihn bediente*. However, when followed by a name, feminine pronouns are used: *Fräulein Müller, **die** mich gestern bediente*.

(b) Neuter singular pronouns are used to refer to male and female persons

Sie stehen eine Weile schweigend, **jedes** die
Hand auf der Schulter des anderen
(*Fallada*)
Bitte **alles** austeigen

*They stand silent for a while, each
with their hand on the other's
shoulder
Everyone please get out*

(c) Adjectives and determiners always agree for grammatical gender

ein jung es Mädchen, das unartig e Bübchen, ein e männlich e Person

This also applies with *Fräulein* followed by a name, for instance at the start of a letter: *Liebes Fräulein Müller* (although, in practice, the address *Fräulein* is nowadays obsolete). Adjectives and determiners also agree with neuter names in -chen, e.g. *das kleine Karlchen, das fleißige Lieschen*.

1.2 Noun plurals

In English, most nouns simply add -s to form the plural. There is no similar

general rule in German, where there are **seven** regular ways of making a noun plural, as shown in [Table 1.5](#).

[Table 1.5](#) The plural of German nouns

Plural formation	Singular	Plural
no ending (-)	der Lehrer das Segel	die Lehrer die Segel
no ending, with <i>Umlaut</i> (¨)	der Vogel der Bruder	die Vögel die Brüder
add <i>-e</i> (-e)	der Arm das Jahr	die Arme die Jahre
add <i>-e</i> , with <i>Umlaut</i> (¨e)	der Stuhl die Hand	die Stühle die Hände
add <i>-er</i> , with <i>Umlaut</i> if possible (-er)/(¨er)	das Tal das Kind	die Täler die Kinder
add <i>-n</i> or <i>-en</i> (-n)/(-en)	die Frau die Wiese	die Frauen die Wiesen
add <i>-s</i> (-s)	der Streik das Auto	die Streiks die Autos

The traditional recommendation is for foreign learners to learn the plural of each noun together with the noun and its gender, e.g.:

der Stuhl ~ die Stühle die Wiese ~ die Wiesen das Jahr ~ die Jahre

However, there are some clear links between the gender of a noun and how it forms its plural, and these are shown in [Table 1.6](#).

[Table 1.6](#) Noun plurals and gender

Plural formation	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
no ending (-)	most ending in <i>-el, -en, -er</i>	NONE	nouns in <i>-el, -en, -er</i> , or <i>-chen</i> and <i>-lein</i> , and nouns in

			<i>Ge...e</i>
no ending, with <i>Umlaut</i> (¨)	about 20 ending in <i>-el, -en, -er</i>	TWO: <i>Mutter, Tochter</i>	TWO: <i>Kloster, Wasser</i>
add <i>-e</i> , without <i>Umlaut</i> (-e)	MOST	those in <i>-nis</i> and <i>-sal</i>	MOST
add <i>-e</i> , with <i>Umlaut</i> (¨e)	many monosyllables	about 30	ONE: <i>Floß</i>
add <i>-er</i> , if possible, with Umlaut (-er)/(¨e)	about 12	NONE	many monosyllables
add <i>-n</i> or <i>-en</i> (-n)/(-en)	all in <i>-e</i> (and a few others)	MOST	about 12
add <i>-s</i>	many foreign words		

In practice, it is worth being aware that the plural of about 75% of German nouns is formed according to the following rules:

- **Masculine** and **neuter** nouns in *-el, -en, -er* have no ending
- Other **masculine** nouns add *-e* with *Umlaut*
- Other **neuter** nouns add *-e* without *Umlaut*
- **Feminine** nouns add *-(e)n*

However, that still leaves about a quarter of nouns which do not follow these rules, and as many of these are frequent, the advice to learn the plural separately with each noun is still valid – and applies especially to those nouns whose plurals are an exception to these basic rules. The following sections give systematic lists of these.

This section gives details on all aspects of the formation and use of noun plurals in German:

- The **regular plural** of **masculine**, **feminine** and **neuter** nouns (sections 1.2.1–1.2.3)
- The **plural ending -s** (section 1.2.4)
- **Unusual plurals** (section 1.2.5)

- Words with **two plurals** with **different meanings** (section 1.2.6)
- **Differences between English and German** in the use of the plural (section 1.2.7)
- The use of the plural with nouns of **weight, measurement and value** (section 1.2.8)

1.2.1 The plural of masculine nouns

(a) Most masculine nouns have a plural in -e or -e

der Arm – die Arme	der Bart – die Bärte
der Hund – die Hunde	der Bock – die Böcke
der Punkt – die Punkte	der Fuß – die Füße
der Versuch – die Versuche	der Stuhl – die Stühle

About three-quarters of the most frequently used masculine nouns have *Umlaut* in the plural if possible. However, there are many common masculine nouns which have a plural in -e without *Umlaut* even though the vowel could have *Umlaut*, especially the following:

der Aal	<i>eel</i>	der Huf	<i>hoof</i>	der Schluck	<i>gulp</i>
der Arm	<i>arm</i>	der Hund	<i>dog</i>	der Schuh	<i>shoe</i>
der Beruf	<i>profession</i>	der Lachs	<i>salmon</i>	der Star	<i>starling</i>
der Besuch	<i>visit</i>	der Laut	<i>sound</i>	der Stoff	<i>material</i>
der Dolch	<i>dagger</i>	der Monat	<i>month</i>	der Tag	<i>day</i>
der Dom	<i>cathedral</i>	der Mond	<i>moon</i>	der Takt	<i>beat (music)</i>
der Druck	<i>pressures</i>	der Ort	<i>place</i>	der Thron	<i>throne</i>
der Erfolg	<i>success</i>	der Pfad	<i>path</i>	der Verlag	<i>publishing house</i>
der Grad	<i>degree</i>	der Punkt	<i>point</i>	der Verlust	<i>loss</i>
der Gurt	<i>belt</i>	der Ruf	<i>call</i>	der Versuch	<i>attempt</i>

Most nouns ending in stressed -al, -an, -ar, -on and -or also have the plural ending -e, without *Umlaut*:

der Bibliothekar – die Bibliothekare der Major – die Majore

However, the following do have *Umlaut* in the plural:

der Altar – die Altäre *altar* der Kardinal – die Kardinäle *cardinal*

der Kanal – die Kanäle *canal* der Tenor – die Tenöre *tenor*

There are a few further irregularities and exceptional cases:

- (i) *der Admiral* and *der General* can have either *“e* or *-e* in the plural, e.g. *die Generale* or *die Generäle*.
- (ii) *der Rest* has the standard plural *-e*, but *-er* is frequent in informal registers.
- (iii) *der Erlass* has a plural in *-e*, i.e. *die Erlasse*, in Germany, but *“e*, i.e. *die Erlässe*, in Austria.
- (iv) The plural of *der Saal* is *die Säle*, see 21.4.2b.

(b) Most masculine nouns ending in - *el*, - *en* or - *er* form their plural without an ending

der Onkel – die Onkel
der Haken – die Haken

der Bäcker – die Bäcker
der Computer – die Computer

Exceptions to this rule are the words which have no ending, but with *Umlaut* of the stressed vowel (see 1.2.1c) and the following (see also 1.2.1e):

der Bauer (-n, -n) *farmer, peasant*
der Bayer (-n, -n) *Bavarian*
der Charakter (-e) *character*
der Muskel (-n) *muscle*

der Pantoffel (-n) *slipper*
der Stachel (-n) *thorn; sting*
der Vetter (-n) *cousin*

(c) About twenty masculine nouns ending in - *el*, - *en* or - *er* form their plural with no ending, but with *Umlaut* of the stressed vowel

der Apfel – die Äpfel

der Vater – die Väter

These are:

der Acker	<i>field</i>	der Magen	<i>stomach</i>
der Apfel	apple	der Mangel	lack
der Boden	floor	der Mantel	coat
der Bruder	brother	der Ofen	stove
der Faden	thread	der Sattel	saddle
der Garten	garden	der Schaden	damage
der Graben	ditch	der Schnabel	beak
der Hafen	harbour	der Schwager	brother-in-law
der Hammer	hammer	der Vater	father
der Kasten	box	der Vogel	<i>bird</i>
der Laden	<i>shop; shutter</i>		

There are a few further irregularities and exceptional cases:

- (i) *der Laden* may be used without *Umlaut* in the plural in North Germany, e.g. *die Laden*, but only in the meaning ‘shutter’.
- (ii) In South Germany *der Bogen*, *der Kragen* and *der Wagen* can also form the plural with *Umlaut*, especially in speech, e.g. *die Bögen*, *die Krägen*, *die Wägen*, and these forms are regularly used in writing in Austria and Switzerland. The compound *der Ell(en)bogen* always forms the plural without *Umlaut*.

(d) About a dozen masculines have a plural in *“er /- er*

der Geist – die Geister der Mann – die Männer der Wald – die Wälder

The vowel takes *Umlaut* if possible. These are:

der Bösewicht	<i>villain</i>	der Rand	<i>edge</i>
der Geist	spirit	der Reichtum	wealth
der Gott	god	der Ski	ski
der Irrtum	error	der Strauch	shrub
der Leib	body	der Wald	forest
der Mann	man	der Wiking	viking
der Mund	<i>mouth</i>	der Wurm	<i>worm</i>

For the plural of compounds in *-mann*, see (f) below.

(e) Some masculine nouns have the plural - *en* /- *n*

(For the use of - *n* or *-en*, see 1.2.2a). These fall into three groups, depending on the inflection of the singular:

- (i) The so-called ‘weak’ masculines (see 1.3.2) which have - (e)*n* in the accusative, genitive and dative singular as well as in the plural, e.g:

der Affe – die Affen	der Mensch – die Menschen
der Bär – die Bären	der Student – die Studenten

- (ii) Some irregular masculines (see 1.3.3). The following occur in the plural:

der Buchstabe	<i>letter (of alphabet)</i>	der Gedanke	<i>thought</i>
der Friede	<i>peace</i>	der Name	<i>name</i>
der Funke	<i>spark</i>	der Same	<i>seed</i>

- (iii) A few other masculines with the regular ending - (e)*s* in the genitive singular:

der Dorn	<i>thorn</i>	der Schmerz	<i>pain</i>
der Fasan	<i>pheasant</i>	der See	<i>lake</i>
der Fleck	<i>spot</i>	der Staat	<i>state</i>
der Lorbeer	<i>laurel</i>	der Stachel	<i>prickle</i>
der Mast	<i>mast</i>	der Strahl	<i>ray</i>
der Muskel	<i>muscle</i>	der Typ	<i>type; bloke, guy</i>
der Nerv	<i>nerve</i>	der Untertan	<i>subject</i>
der Pantoffel	<i>slipper</i>	der Vetter	<i>cousin</i>
der Pfau	<i>peacock</i>	der Zeh	<i>toe</i>

Words in unstressed - *on* and - *or* also belong to this group, with a plural in *-en*, but the stress moves in the plural, see 21.1.6d:

der 'Dämon – die Dä'monen

der Pro'fessor – die Profes'soren

There are a few irregularities and exceptional cases:

- (i) *der Bau* 'building' and *der Sporn* 'spur' have the irregular plurals *die Bauten* and *die Sporen*.
- (ii) *die Seen* is pronounced *See-en* [ze:ə n], see 21.4.2a.
- (iii) *der Fleck* has an alternative singular form *der Flecken*.
- (iv) *der Zeh* has the alternative (mainly North German) singular *die Zehe*.
- (v) In the meaning 'bloke', 'guy' *der Typ* may have 'weak' singular forms, e.g. *dem Typen*, in colloquial speech, see 1.3.2c.
- (vi) The plural *die Pastöre* from *der Pastor* is frequent in North Germany.

(f) The plural of nouns in - *mann*

Compounds of - *mann* usually replace this by - *leute* in the plural when they refer to the occupation as such or to the group as a whole:

der Fachmann – die Fachleute

der Kaufmann – die Kaufleute

In cases where we think more in terms of individuals than a group, or where we are not dealing with persons, the plural is formed with - *männer*, e.g.:

die Ehrenmänner, Froschmänner, Schneemänner, Staatsmänner

With some nouns both are used:

die Feuerwehrleute/-männer

die Kameralleute/-männer

There is a difference between these since plurals in - *männer* are normally taken to refer to a set of male individuals, whereas those in - *leute* can be used to refer to a collection of people which may include females (for which there is a distinct singular form in - *frau*, e.g. *die Fachfrau*). A similar distinction applies with the following, where the forms in - *leute* typically denote groups including females:

die Ehemänner *husbands*, *but* die Eheleute *married couples* (i.e. *Ehemänner + Ehefrauen*)

die Seemänner *seamen* (as individuals), *but* die Seeleute *seafaring folk* (general)

1.2.2 The plural of feminine nouns

(a) Over 90% of all feminine nouns have the plural - *en* /- *n*

The ending - *n* is used with nouns ending in - *e*, - *el* or - *er*, and - *en* with other nouns:

die Arbeit – die Arbeiten
die Last – die Lasten

die Regel – die Regeln
die Wiese – die Wiesen

Nouns in - *in* double the final *n* in the plural, e.g. *die Studentin* – *die Studentinnen*

Exceptionally, *die Werkstatt* has an irregular plural with the suffix - *en* and *Umlaut*: *die Werkstätten*.

(b) About a quarter of feminine monosyllables have a plural in - *e*

die Hand – die Hände

die Nuss – die Nüsse

The following are the most common. Note that over half end in -*t*:

die Angst	<i>fear</i>	die Haut	<i>skin</i>	die Nacht	<i>night</i>
die Axt	<i>axe</i>	die Kraft	<i>strength</i>	die Naht	<i>seam</i>
die Bank	<i>bench</i>	die Kuh	<i>cow</i>	die Not	<i>need, distress</i>
die Braut	<i>fiancée</i>	die Kunst	<i>art</i>	die Nuss	<i>nut</i>
die Brust	<i>breast</i>	die Laus	<i>louse</i>	die Sau	<i>sow</i>
die Faust	<i>fist</i>	die Luft	<i>air; breeze</i>	die Schnur	<i>string</i>
die Frucht	<i>fruit</i>	die Lust	<i>desire</i>	die Stadt	<i>town, city</i>
die Gans	<i>goose</i>	die Macht	<i>power</i>	die Wand	<i>wall</i>
die Gruft	<i>vault, tomb</i>	die Magd	<i>maid</i>	die Wurst	<i>sausage</i>
die Hand	<i>hand</i>	die Maus	<i>mouse</i>	die Zunft	<i>guild</i>

Compounds of - *brunst*, - *flucht* and - *kunft* also have a plural in - *e*:

die Feuersbrunst – die Feuersbrünste
die Ausflucht – die Ausflüchte

die Auskunft – die Auskünfte

die Sau and *die Schnur* can have the plural ending - *en* in technical registers.

(c) Feminine nouns in - *nis* and - *sal* have the plural - *e*

In practice few of these nouns are used in the plural. Those in - *nis* double the final *s*:

die Kenntnis – die Kenntnisse

die Mühsal – die Mühsale

(d) Two feminine nouns have a plural with *Umlaut* and no ending (¨)

die Mutter – die Mütter (see 1.2.6) die Tochter – die Töchter

1.2.3 The plural of neuter nouns

(a) About three quarters of neuter nouns have the plural - *e*

This group includes most neuters of more than one syllable, especially foreign words.

das Bein – die Beine
das Gefäß – die Gefäße
das Jahr – die Jahre

das Schaf – die Schafe
das Ventil – die Ventile
das Verbot – die Verbote

Nouns ending in - *nis* double the consonant in the plural: *das Zeugnis* – *die Zeugnisse*.

Note that *das Knie* and *das Regime* belong to this group, with the plurals *die Knie*, pronounced *Knie-e* [kni: ə] (see 21.4.2a) and *die Regime*, pronounced [rɛʒi:

mə].

(b) About a quarter of neuter nouns have the plural *¨er* /- *er*

Umlaut is used if possible. The majority are monosyllabic, e.g.:

das Blatt – die Blätter	das Kind – die Kinder
das Dorf – die Dörfer	das Tal – die Täler

A few neuter nouns of more than one syllable also have this ending. The following are common:

das Denkmal <i>monument</i>	das Gesicht <i>face</i>
das Gehalt <i>salary</i>	das Gespenst <i>ghost</i>
das Gemach <i>chamber</i> (elev.)	das Regiment <i>regiment</i>
das Gemüt <i>mood</i>	das Spital <i>hospice</i>
das Geschlecht <i>sex</i>	

In addition, all nouns in - *tum* take this plural, e.g. *das Altertum – die Altertümer*.

There are a few irregularities and exceptional cases:

- (i) *das Denkmal* also occurs in the alternative plural form *die Denkmale*, but this is less frequent than *die Denkmäler*.
- (ii) *das Ross* 'steed' (usual plural *die Rosse*) often has the plural *¨er*, i.e. *die Rösser*, in Austria and Bavaria, where it is the everyday word for 'horse'.
- (iii) A few words are used colloquially with a plural form in - *er* / *¨er* in a derogatory or facetious sense, e.g. *die Dinger* (see 1.2.6) , *die Scheusäler*.

(c) Neuter nouns ending in - *el*, - *en*, - *er*, diminutives in - *chen* and - *lein* and words in *Ge...e* have no ending in the plural (-)

das Segel – die Segel	das Mädchen – die Mädchen
das Kissen – die Kissen	das Büchlein – die Büchlein

das Messer – die Messer

das Gebäude – die Gebäude

The only exceptions are the nouns dealt with in 1.2.3d below.

(d) Two neuter nouns have plurals in (‘‘)

das Kloster – die Klöster das Wasser – die Wässer

The plural *die Wässer* is used for types or sorts of water (e.g. mineral waters). To refer to masses of water the alternative plural, without *Umlaut*, i.e. *die Wasser* is used, see 1.2.6. Compounds of *Wasser*, e.g. *das Abwasser* ‘sewage’ always have a plural with *Umlaut*, i.e. *die Abwässer*.

(e) A few neuter nouns have the plural - *en* /- *n*

das Auge – die Augen

das Hemd – die Hemden

The following are the most frequent:

das Auge	<i>eye</i>	das Hemd	<i>shirt</i>	das Juwel	<i>jewel</i>
das Bett	<i>bed</i>	das Herz	<i>heart</i>	das Ohr	<i>ear</i>
das Ende	<i>end</i>	das Insekt	<i>insect</i>	das Statut	<i>statute</i>
das Fakt	<i>fact</i>	das Interesse	<i>interest</i>	das Verb	<i>verb</i>

Scientific terms in - *on* also have the plural - *en*, but the stress shifts in the plural: *das E’lektron* – *die Elek’tronen*.

There are a few irregularities and exceptional cases:

- (i) *das Herz* has an irregular singular, i.e. *das Herz, des Herzens, dem Herzen* (see 1.3.3b).
- (ii) *das Kleinod* ‘jewel’ has the irregular plural *die Kleinodien*.

(f) One neuter noun has the plural - *e*

das Floß *raft* – die Flöße

1.2.4 The plural ending -s

The plural ending -s occurs with nouns of all three genders, but it is restricted to some special cases.

(a) - s is used with many loan-words from English or French

das Atelier – die Ateliers	das Labor – die Labors
der Balkon – die Balkons	der Park – die Parks
der Chef – die Chefs	der Scheck – die Schecks
das Detail – die Details	der Streik – die Streiks
der Download – die Downloads	das Team – die Teams
das Hotel – die Hotels	der Waggon – die Waggonen

Some loan-words from English and French have been assimilated and have German plural forms. This is especially the case with English nouns in *-el* and *-er*, which almost always have the regular endingless plural, e.g. *der Tunnel – die Tunnel*; *der Computer – die Computer*, although there can be some variation, and forms with *-s* (e.g. *die Tunnels*) occur occasionally. Some loans from French like *der Balkon* tend to have the plural in *-s* if they are given a French pronunciation, i.e. [balkɔ̃], but a German plural, i.e. *die Balkone* if they are pronounced in a German fashion, i.e. [balkoːn]. In writing, though, *die Balkone* is nowadays more frequent.

English loan-words in *-y* have a plural in *-ys*, e.g. *die Babys*, *die Handys*, *die Partys*, not in *-ies* like English *babies*, etc.

(b) - s is used with most words ending in a vowel other than unstressed -e

das Auto – die Autos	die Oma – die Omas
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der Euro – die Euros
das Genie – die Genies

der Ossi – die Ossis
der Uhu – die Uhus

Some foreign words with unusual plurals are exceptions to this rule (see 1.2.5), as are most feminine nouns in - *ee* and - *ie* which have regular plurals, e.g. *die Allee* – *die Alleen*, *die Galerie* – *die Galerien*.

(c) - s is used with abbreviations and shortened words

die AG – die AGs
der PKW – die PKWs

der Akku – die Akkus
die Lok – die Loks

This ending is often omitted with some abbreviations, especially *die LKW*, *die PKW*.

(d) - s is used with some North German seafaring words

The most frequent are:

das Deck – die Decks
das Dock – die Docks

der Kai – die Kais
das Wrack – die Wracks

(e) - s is used in colloquial speech with some words referring to persons

die Bengels, die Doktors, die Fräuleins, die Jungs (*older*: die Jungens),

die Kerls, die Kumpels, die Mädels, die Onkels

This usage is typical of non-standard North German speech, where some of them are very frequent. The standard plural form (*die Jungen*, *die Kumpel*, *die Mädels*, etc.) is preferred in writing.

(f) - s is used with family and other names

die Müllers, die Buddenbrooks, zwischen den beiden Deutschlands (*Zeit*)

With geographical names it is also possible to use an endless plural, e.g. *die beiden Korea(s)*.

1.2.5 Unusual plurals

A number of words, particularly those borrowed into German from the classical languages or Italian, have kept unusual plural forms. Some are in practice restricted to formal written language.

(a) Most words in - *us* or - *um* replace this by - *en* in the plural

das Album – die Alben (*coll.* Albums)
der Genius – die Genien
der Globus – die Globen (*rarely*: die
Globusse)
das Museum – die Museen

der Organismus – die Organismen
der Rhythmus – die Rhythmen
das Zentrum – die Zentren
der Zyklus – die Zyklen

Some foreign words in - *us* have adopted a native plural in - *e* (spelled with double - *ss*-):

der Bonus – die Bonusse (*also* die
Boni)
der Bus – die Busse

der Krokus – die Krokusse (*rarely*: die
Krokus)
der Zirkus – die Zirkusse

There are a few irregularities and exceptional cases:

der 'Kaktus – die Kak 'teen, pronounced [kakte: ən] (*coll.* die Kaktusse)

das Tempus *tense* – die Tempora

der Terminus *term* – die Termini

das Visum – die Visa (die Visen)

(b) Most words in - *ma* have a plural in - *men*

das Aroma – die Aromen (*less often: Aromas*)

das Dogma – die Dogmen

das Drama – die Dramen

die Firma – die Firmen

das Thema – die Themen (*acad. Themata; coll. Themas*)

das Trauma – die Traumen (*acad. Traumata*)

A few used to have a plural in - *mata*, but the plural ending - *s* is now more frequent with them:

das Dilemma – die Dilemmas (*older: die Dilemmata*)

das Komma – die Kommas (*older: die Kommata*)

das Klima – die Klimas (*older: die Klimata or Klimate*)

das Schema – die Schemas (*older: die Schemata*)

(c) A few words replace - *a* with - *en*

die Pizza – die Pizzen (*or die Pizzas*)
die Razzia – die Razzien (*or die Razzias*)
die Regatta – die Regatten

die Skala – die Skalen
die Veranda – die Veranden
die Villa – die Villen

(d) Other frequent words with unusual plurals

Many of these have alternatives, with the foreign plural being used chiefly in more formal registers.

das Adverb – die Adverbien
der Atlas – die Atlanten (*coll. Atlasse*)
die Basis – die Basen
das Cello – die Celli *or* Cellos
das Epos – die Epen

das Mineral – die Mineralien *or* Minerale
der Mythos – die Mythen
die Praxis – die Praxen
das Prinzip – die Prinzipien
das Privileg – die Privilegien
das Prozedere – die Prozedere

der Espresso – die Espressos <i>or</i> Espressi	das Reptil – die Reptilien
das Examen – die Examen (<i>older</i> : Examina)	das Risiko – die Risiken (<i>coll.</i> Risikos)
das Fossil – die Fossilien	der Saldo – die Salden <i>or</i> Saldos <i>or</i> Saldi
das Fresko – die Fresken	das Solo – die Soli <i>or</i> Solos
der Index – die Indexe <i>or</i> Indices <i>or</i> Indizes	das Stadion – die Stadien
das Konto – die Konten (<i>rare</i> : Konti <i>or</i> Kontos)	das Tempo – die Tempi (<i>coll.</i> Tempos)
das Lexikon – die Lexika (<i>rare</i> : Lexiken, <i>coll.</i> Lexikons)	das Textil – die Textilien
das Material – die Materialien	das Utensil – die Utensilien

1.2.6 A few nouns have two plural forms with different meanings

The following are the most common:

	die Abdrucke <i>offprints</i>
	die Abdrücke <i>impressions</i>
	die Bande <i>bonds</i> (elev.)
	die Bänder <i>ribbons</i>
der Abdruck	die Bänke <i>benches</i>
das Band	die Banken <i>banks</i>
die Bank	die Bauten <i>buildings</i>
der Bau	die Baue <i>den, burrow</i> (of animal)
der Block	die Blöcke <i>lumps, blocks</i>
das Ding	die Blocks <i>blocks</i> (houses, paper)
der Effekt	die Dinge <i>things</i>
	die Dinger <i>things</i> (coll.); <i>girls</i> (coll.)
	die Effekte <i>effects</i> (results)
	die Effekten <i>effects</i> (valuables)
	die Gesichter <i>faces</i>
	die Gesichte <i>visions</i>
	die Länder <i>countries, provinces</i>

	die Lande <i>regions (esp. in historical contexts)</i>
das Gesicht	die Männer <i>men</i>
das Land	die Mannen <i>vassals (hist.)</i>
der Mann	die Mütter <i>mothers</i>
die Mutter	die Muttern <i>nuts (for bolts)</i>
der Rat	die Räte <i>councils, officials</i>
der Stock	die Ratschläge <i>pieces of advice</i>
der Strauß	die Stöcke <i>sticks</i>
das Wasser	die Stockwerke <i>storeys (sg. also: das Stockwerk)</i>
das Wort	die Strauße <i>ostriches</i>
	die Sträube <i>bunches (of flowers)</i>
	die Wasser <i>masses of water (e.g. die Wasser des Nil)</i>
	die Wässer <i>types of water (e.g. mineral water)</i>
	die Wörter <i>words (in isolation)</i>
	die Worte <i>words (connected words, i.e. sayings)</i>

Further notes on some of these:

The plural *die Blöcke* can be used for any meaning of *der Block*, but *die Blocks* can only be used in the meaning ‘blocks’ of paper, houses, etc. In practice, it is less common.

Although purists have long insisted on it, the distinction between *die Wörter* and *die Worte* is frequently ignored in practice, especially in less formal German.

1.2.7 Differences between English and German in using the plural

(a) German singular for English plural

There are several cases where the nearest equivalent to an English plural noun is a German singular:

das Archiv	<i>archives</i>	die Politik	<i>politics</i>
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die Asche	ashes	das Protokoll	minutes (of meeting)
das Aussehen	looks	der Pyjama	pyjamas
das Benehmen	manners	der Reichtum	riches
der Besitz	possessions	im Rückstand	in arrears
der Bodensatz	dregs	der Schadenersatz	damages (legal)
die Brille	spectacles	die Schere	scissors
der Dank	thanks	das Schilf	reeds
das Fernglas	binoculars	die Treppe	(flight of) stairs, steps
der Hafer	oats	die Umgebung	surroundings
das Hauptquartier	headquarters	die Waage	scales
die Hose	trousers	die Wahl	elections
der Inhalt	contents	das Werk	works (factory)
die Kaserne	barracks	die Zange	tongs
der Lohn	wages	der Ziegenpeter	mumps
das Mittel	means	der Zirkel	(pair of) compasses
das Mittelalter	<i>the Middle Ages</i>		

Most of these German words can be used in the plural in appropriate contexts:

Warum hast du zwei Brillen gekauft?	<i>Why did you buy two pairs of spectacles?</i>
Die meisten Löhne sind erhöht worden	Most wages have been raised
Er wohnt zwei Treppen hoch	<i>He lives on the second floor</i>

(b) Some German nouns are only used in the plural

In most cases this corresponds to English usage, e.g. *die Ferien* 'holidays', *die Leute* 'people', but there are some exceptions to this.

(i) With the following, the usual equivalent of German plural nouns is an English singular:

die Flitterwochen	<i>honeymoon</i>	die Naturalien	<i>natural produce</i>
die Geschwister	brothers and sisters	die Pocken	<i>smallpox</i>
die Immobilien	property, real estate	die Ränke	<i>intrigue</i> (elev.)
die Kosten	cost(s)	die Trümmer	<i>rubble</i>
die Kurzwaren	haberdashery	die Wirren	<i>turmoil</i>
die Lebensmittel	food		

die Möbel

furniture

die Zinsen

interest (on a loan)

Note that *die Eltern* has no commonly used singular corresponding to English 'parent', although *ein Elternteil* can be used in formal German.

(ii) Names of festivals:

Ostern, *Pfingsten* and *Weihnachten* are generally treated as neuter singulars:

Wir haben ein stilles Weihnachten verbracht
Hast du ein schönes Ostern gehabt?

We spent a quiet Christmas
Did you have a nice Easter?

If they are the subject of a verb, the verb is in the singular:

Weihnachten steht vor der Tür
Pfingsten fällt dieses Jahr spät

Christmas is almost here
Whitsun is late this year

In greetings or used with an adjective, however, they are treated as plural:

Frohe Weihnachten!

Sie hat uns letzte Ostern besucht

(c) German nouns with no plural

There are a few German nouns which do not have a plural, although the nearest English equivalents do. With these a plural has to be expressed in other ways in German, using a compound or a synonym:

der Atem *breath*

die Atemzüge *breaths*

das Essen *meal*

die Mahlzeiten *meals* (*rarely*: die Essen)

die Furcht *fear*

die Befürchtungen *fears*

der Käse *cheese*

die Käsesorten *cheeses* (*rarely*: die Käse)

der Kohl *cabbage*

die Kohlköpfe *cabbages*

die Liebe *love*

die Liebschaften *loves* (*rarely*: die Lieben)

der Luxus *luxury* die Luxusartikel *luxuries*
 das Obst *fruit* die Obstsorten *fruits*
 der Rasen *lawn* die Rasenflächen *lawns*
 der Raub *robbery* die Raubüberfälle *robberies*
 der Sport *sport* die Sportarten *sports*
 der Tod *death* die Todesfälle *deaths* (*rarely*: die Tode)
 das Unglück *accident* die Unglücksfälle *accidents*

The following words are used in the singular only in German, and this corresponds to either singular or plural in English:

der Kummer *care(s)* die Sehnsucht *longing(s)* der Verdacht *suspicion(s)*

(d) German equivalents of English nouns with no plural

Some English nouns do not have a plural, although the nearest German equivalents do. With these, English expresses singular or plural in other ways, especially with an additional word for the singular:

die Auskunft (*piece of*) *information* die Auskünfte *information*
 der Blitz (*flash of*) *lightning* die Blitze *flashes of lightning*
 das Brot *bread, loaf* die Brote *loaves*
 der Fortschritt *advance* die Fortschritte *progress*
 die Hausaufgabe (*piece of*) *homework* die Hausaufgaben *homework*
 die Information (*piece of*) *information* die Informationen *information*
 die Kenntnis (*piece of*) *knowledge* die Kenntnisse *knowledge*
 die Nachricht (*piece of*) *news* die Nachrichten *news*
 der Rat (*piece of*) *advice* die Ratschläge (*pieces of*) *advice*
 der Schaden *damage* die Schäden (*instances of*) *damage*

(e) Using a singular noun for items of clothing and parts of the body

With reference to two or more people, a singular noun is used in German for parts of the body or items of clothing if each person involved only has one of each. In these contexts English normally uses the plural:

Alle hoben **die rechte Hand**
Ihnen klopfte **das Herz**

They all raised their right hands
Their hearts were beating

To use the plural *die Herzen* in the last example could suggest that each person had more than one heart. Nevertheless, exceptions to this rule are not unknown, especially if the possessive is used rather than the definite article (see 4.6.1), e.g.:

Die Passagiere drehten **ihre Köpfe** (*Frisch*) *The passengers turned their heads*

1.2.8 Nouns of weight, measurement and value

Masculine and neuter nouns of weight, measurement and value, preceded by a numeral, have the singular form, not the plural:

zwei **Pfund** Kirschen zwei **Sack** Kartoffeln drei **Dutzend** Eier zwei **Fass** Wein
zwei **Paar** Schuhe zwanzig englische **Pfund** um ein paar **Dollar** mehr

zwei, drei, mehrere **Glas** Bier
ein paar **Schluck** (Kaffee)
Wir hatten zehn **Grad** Kälte
zehn **Schritt**
3 **Schuss** – ein Euro 50

two, three several glasses of beer
a few mouthfuls (of coffee)
We had ten degrees of frost
ten paces
3 shots for one euro fifty

The singular is also typically used when shopping or ordering in restaurants:

Diese hier sind gerade das Richtige. Geben Sie mir bitte drei **Stück** !
Bringen Sie mir bitte drei **Erdbeereis** und zwei Glas **Bier** !

However, if they are seen as individual objects, masculine and neuter nouns of

measurement do have plural endings:

Auf dem Hof lagen zehn **Fässer**

There were ten barrels in the yard

Feminine nouns of measurement do take the plural form:

zehn **Flaschen** Wein

zwei **Ladungen** Holz

vier **Tassen** Kaffee

However, *die Mark* never has a plural ending: *zwanzig Mark*.

For the agreement of the verb with measurement phrases, see 10.1.4f.

1.3 The declension of nouns to show case

CASE shows the relationship of a noun or noun phrase to the sentence as a whole (see [Chapter 2](#)), and German typically indicates the four cases NOMINATIVE, ACCUSATIVE, GENITIVE and DATIVE by means of INFLECTION, i.e. by changing the form of the words in the noun phrase, and these changes are known as the DECLENSION of these words. In German it is most often the determiner and adjectives which decline rather than the noun itself (see [Chapters 4–6](#)), but there are some instances where German nouns have inflections in the form of ENDINGS to show case, in particular:

- **masculine** and **neuter** nouns add - **s** or - **es** in the **genitive singular**
- - **n** is added in the **dative plural** if possible

[Table 1.7](#) shows the declension of some typical regular nouns.

[Table 1.7](#) Case endings of regular nouns

	Masculine		Feminine		Neuter	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	der Vater	die Väter	die Frau	die Frauen	das Kind	die Kinder
Acc.	den Vater	die Väter	die Frau	die Frauen	das Kind	die Kinder
Gen.	des Vaters	der Väter	der Frau	der Frauen	des Kindes	der Kinder
Dat.	dem Vater	den Vätern	der Frau	den Frauen	dem Kind	den Kindern
Nom.	der Park	die Parks	die Hand	die Hände	das Jahr	die Jahre
Acc.	den Park	die Parks	die Hand	die Hände	das Jahr	die Jahre
Gen.	des Parks	der Parks	der Hand	der Hände	des Jahres	der Jahre
Dat.	dem Park	den Parks	der Hand	den Händen	dem Jahr	den Jahren

An important group of masculine nouns, mostly denoting living male beings, have the so-called ‘weak’ declension, with the ending - **(e)n** in the plural and all the cases of the singular except the nominative. Examples are shown in [Table 1.8](#).

[Table 1.8](#) ‘Weak’ masculine nouns

	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	der Junge	die Junge n	der Student	die Student en
Acc.	den Junge n	die Junge n	den Student en	die Student en
Gen.	des Junge n	der Junge n	des Student en	der Student en
Dat.	dem Junge n	den Junge n	dem Student en	den Student en

This section gives more detailed information on noun declension:

- The declension of **regular nouns** (section 1.3.1)
- ‘**Weak**’ masculine nouns (section 1.3.2)
- The declension of **irregular masculine** and **neuter** nouns (section 1.3.3)
- The **dative singular** ending - **e** (section 1.3.4)
- The **genitive singular** ending - **(e)s** (section 1.3.5)
- The declension of **names** (section 1.3.6)

1.3.1 The declension of regular nouns

With most German nouns there are two endings to signal case, which are added to the basic singular or plural forms, giving the regular declension patterns

illustrated in [Table 1.7](#). These endings are:

(a) Masculine and neuter nouns add - s or - es in the genitive singular

des Bahnhof **s**, des Busch **es**, des Fenster **s**, des Mann **(e)s**, des Tal **(e)s**

For the use of - s or - es and the occasional omission of this ending, see 1.3.5.

(b) - n is added in the dative plural if possible

den Kinder **n**, den Fenster **n**, den Hunde **n**, den Stühle **n**, den Töchter **n**

If the plural of the noun ends in - n or - s, this ending cannot be added in the dative plural:

den Gärten, den Frauen, den Autos, den Müllers

Further notes on the dative plural of nouns:

- (i) Nouns of measurement often drop the - n after numerals: *eine Entfernung von fünf Kilometer(n)*.
- (ii) In colloquial German the ending - n is sometimes omitted, and one may even see notices such as *Eis mit Früchte*. This is considered incorrect.
- (iii) No - n is used in the set phrase *aus aller Herren Länder* 'from the four corners of the earth'

1.3.2 'Weak' masculine nouns

An important group of masculine nouns, most of which denote male human beings or animals, have the ending - n or - en throughout the plural **and in all singular cases** except the nominative. These are called (for no good reason) 'weak' masculine nouns, and their inflections are shown in [Table 1.8](#). Nouns ending in - e or - er have the ending -n, like *der Junge*, nouns ending in another

consonant have the ending - *en*, like *der Student*.

(a) The ‘weak’ masculine nouns fall into three main groups

(i) those which end in - *e* in the nominative singular. These all denote male human beings or animals:

der Affe, der Bote, der Chinese, der Franzose, der Schwabe

Note that there are a few masculine nouns in - *e* which denote things. These have different inflectional endings, in particular the eight irregular nouns which decline like *der Name* (see 1.3.3). Two further nouns, *der Käse* and *der Charme*, are regular.

(ii) a large number of foreign nouns, in particular those with the following stressed endings:

-*and*, -*ant*, -*aph*, -*arch*, -*at*, -*ent*, - *et*, -*ist*, -*krat*, -*log(e)*, -*nom*, - *on*, -*ot*

Most of these (but by no means all) denote male human beings, e.g.:

der Doktorand, der Diamant, der Monarch, der Automat, der Demokrat,
der Student,

der Komet, der Komponist, der Psycholog(e), der Astronom, der Dämon,
der Idiot

There are also a number of such words with other endings, e.g.:

der Barbar, der Chirurg, der Kamerad, der Katholik, der Prinz, der Tyrann

(iii) a few native nouns denoting male humans or animals which do not end in - *e* in the nominative singular. The most frequent are:

der Bär	<i>bear</i>	der Hirt	<i>shepherd</i>
der Bauer	peasant	der Mensch	human being
der Bayer	Bavarian	der Nachbar	neighbour

der Bub	<i>lad</i> (S.G.)	der Narr	fool
der Fink	<i>finch</i>	der Oberst	colonel
der Fürst	prince	der Ochs	ox
der Graf	count	der Papagei	parrot
der Held	hero	der Spatz	sparrow
der Herr	<i>gentleman</i>	der Tor	<i>fool</i> (lit.)

(b) Weak masculine nouns have no ending in the singular if they are used without a determiner

This avoids the possibility of confusion between singular and plural:

Die Situation war für Arzt und Patient kritisch	<i>The situation was critical for doctor and patient alike</i>
Ich schrieb an Christian Schulze, Präsident des Gesangsvereins	<i>I wrote to Christian Schulze, the president of the choral society</i>

(c) The singular endings of weak masculine nouns are often dropped in colloquial German

i.e. they have the ‘regular’ forms: *den Bär, des Bärs, dem Bär*. In principle, this usage is considered non-standard and incorrect, especially in writing, but it is clearly becoming more widespread, especially with endless forms of the accusative and dative singular. Indeed, with a few of these nouns it has come to be considered acceptable, so that with these the regular forms are in practice now used at least as frequently as the ‘weak’ endings. This is the case with the following:

der Magnet, der Oberst, der Papagei, der Partisan, der Spatz, der Untertan

Rather less frequently, regular endings are also used and felt to be acceptable with *der Bauer* and *der Nachbar*.

der Typ ‘bloke’, ‘guy’ (see 1.2.1e) is often used with the ‘weak’ singular endings

in colloquial speech: *den Typen, des Typen, dem Typen*. ‘Weak’ singular endings occasionally occur with other words, even in writing, especially those denoting male humans or animals, e.g. *des Autoren, des Zwergen*, but these forms are considered incorrect.

(d) The noun *der Herr*

der Herr is a ‘weak’ masculine noun, but it has the ending - *n* in the singular and - *en* in the plural, e.g.:

Singular: *den, des, dem Herr n* Plural: *die, der den Herr en*

Unlike other ‘weak’ masculine nouns it always keeps the ending - *n* in the singular even if used without a determiner, e.g. (when addressing an envelope): *Herrn Alfred Bletzer*.

(e) ‘Weak’ masculine nouns should not be confused with adjectives used as nouns

Nouns like *der Beamte* and *der Vorsitzende* seem to have similar endings to ‘weak’ masculine nouns, but in fact they have the endings of adjectives, see 6.2.

1.3.3 Irregular masculine and neuter nouns

(a) Nine masculine nouns are irregular

They have the ending - *n* in the plural and in the accusative and dative singular, but - *ns* in the genitive singular:

	Singular	Plural
Nom.	der Name	die Nam en
Acc.	den Nam en	die Nam en

Gen.	des Nam ens	der Nam en
Dat.	dem Nam en	den Nam en

The following nouns belong to this group:

der Buchstabe	<i>letter</i> (of alphabet)	der Haufe	<i>heap, pile</i>
der Friede	<i>peace</i>	der Name	name
der Funke	spark	der Same	seed
der Gedanke	thought	der Wille	<i>will</i>
der Glaube	<i>belief</i>		

The form of some of these words can vary, so that *der Friede*, *der Funke* and *der Same* have alternative regular forms with - *n* in the nominative singular, i.e. *der Frieden*, *der Funken*, *der Samen*. In practice, *der Haufen* and *der Samen* have almost completely replaced *der Haufe* and *der Same*, *der Frieden* is much more frequent than *der Friede*, but *der Funke* is still more usual than *der Funken*.

(b) The neuter noun *das Herz* is irregular

The neuter noun *das Herz* has similar forms to the irregular masculine nouns:

	Singular	Plural
Nom.	das Herz	die Herzen
Acc.	das Herz	die Herzen
Gen.	des Herzens	der Herzen
Dat.	dem Herzen	den Herzen

However, regular singular forms, i.e. *des Herzes*, *dem Herz*, are not uncommon in colloquial speech and medical writing.

1.3.4 Dative singular in -*e*

In older German, regular masculine and neuter nouns, particularly those of one syllable, regularly added - *e* in the dative singular, e.g.:

dem Fluss e, dem Mann e, dem Tag e, dem Tal e

This 'dative - e' is now uncommon, but it is still not unusual in formal writing, reflecting traditional literary usage, although it can sometimes sound affected or facetious. However, it is still current in some set phrases:

das Kind mit dem Bade ausschütten	<i>to throw out the baby with the bathwater</i>
im Falle, dass	in the event that
bis zu einem gewissen Grade	<i>to a certain extent</i>
im Grunde genommen	<i>basically</i>
jdm. zum Halse heraushängen	to be sick of sth.
jdm. im Halse stecken bleiben	to stick in sb.'s throat
nach Hause	home
zu Hause	at home
im Jahre 2017	in 2017
auf dem Lande	in the country
im Laufe des Tages	in the course of the day
bei Lichte betrachtet/besehen	seen in the (cold) light of day
in gewissem Maße	to a certain extent
jdn. zu Rate ziehen	to consult sb.
in diesem Sinne	in this sense
am Tage	by day
unter Tage arbeiten	<i>to work below ground</i>
(nicht) zum Zuge kommen	<i>(not) to get a look- in</i>

Some of these phrases are also often used without the -e, e.g. *im Lauf des Tages*, *am Tag*.

1.3.5 The masculine and neuter genitive singular

(a) The endings - es and - s

Regular masculine and neuter nouns have the ending - s or - es in the genitive singular, e.g. *des Buchs*, *des Tages*. The choice between these is only fixed where the ending -s would be impossible or difficult to pronounce, i.e.:

The ending - es must be used with nouns ending in - s, - *ß*, - *x* or - *z*, e.g.:

des Krebs **es**, des Maß **es**, des Reflex **es**, des Sitz **es**, des Kreuz **es**

Nouns in - *nis* have double - *ss* -, e.g. *des Ereignisses*.

It is also the usual option with nouns in - ***sch***, - ***st*** or - *zt* (although -*s* is possible with these), e.g.:

des Tisch **es**, des Dienst **es**, des Arzt **es**

The ending - s, on the other hand, is the usual choice

(i) with words ending in a vowel:

des Büros, des Knies, des Rehs, des Schnees, des Schuhs, des Sofas, des Uhus

(ii) with names and foreign words:

Schillers Dramen, die Einwohner Berlins, des Hotels, des Klubs, des Prinzips, des Rheins

(iii) with polysyllabic words, especially those ending in an unstressed syllable:

des Abends, des Königs, des Lehrers, des Mädchens, des Schicksals, des Wagens, des Zufalls

With other words the choice is largely a matter of individual preference, and either ending is regarded as correct. Some speakers feel that the ending - *es* is more formal or elevated, but this is not borne out by actual usage, and there often seems to be quite arbitrary variation between individual words.

Nevertheless, which ending is used does seem to depend in practice on the frequency of the word, with a **clear preference for - es** with the most commonly used words, especially if they end in more than one consonant. Thus, for example, *des Gastes* and *des Hundes* are rather more frequent than *des Gasts* and *des Hunds*.

(b) Lack of the genitive ending - (e)s

There is a clear and increasing tendency to omit the ending - (e)s in the genitive singular of masculine and neuter nouns. In most cases this would be considered incorrect, but it has become accepted in the following contexts.

(i) with the names of the days of the week, months and seasons

in den Abendstunden des folgenden Mittwoch(s)

am Morgen des zehnten Januar(s)

die kräftigste Zyklone des beginnenden Herbst (NZZ)

The omission of the ending - s with days of the week is widespread, but not always accepted as correct.

(ii) with names of artistic styles and epochs

des Barock(s), des Empire(s), des Jugendstil(s), des Rokoko(s)

(iii) with abbreviations and other parts of speech used as nouns

With these, the omission of the ending is optional, e.g.:

ein Stück des eignen Ich(s)	des LKW(s)
eines gewissen Jemand(s)	die Aussprache des modernen Deutsch(s)
meines Gegenüber(s)	

The currency unit *der Euro* is treated in this way, with the ending -s optional: *des Euro(s)*.

(iv) with technical terms or specific names, e.g.:

des Dativ(s), des Dynamo(s), des Establishment(s), des Gulasch(s), des Holunder(s), des Interesse(s), des Islam(s), des Karfreitag(s), des Ostersonntag(s), des Parlament(s), des Parterre(s), des Radar(s)

(v) **after prepositions** when the noun has no adjective or determiner with it, e.g.:

laut Bericht	wegen Schnee geschlossen	trotz Geldmangel
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In the following example we see how the omission of - s can depend on the absence or presence of an article or adjective:

eine Agrar-Reform, die aber wegen Geldmangel und gebremsten Eifers nur langsam vorankommt (Zeit)	<i>an agricultural reform which is proceeding only slowly because of a lack of money and limited enthusiasm</i>
---	---

However, usage is still variable, and the genitive ending is not unusual even if no article or adjective is present:

eine Strafuntersuchung gegen mehrere Stadtpolizisten wegen schwerer Körperverletzung und Amtsmissbrauchs (NZZ)	<i>a criminal investigation against several city police officers for grievous bodily harm and abuse of office</i>
--	---

(vi) **with foreign nouns ending in - s or - x**

With these it is usual to omit the ending:

des Atlas, des Chaos, des Globus, des Index, des Rhythmus, des Sozialismus

The most frequent of these words may, alternatively, have the ending - es, e.g. *des Atlases*, and some foreign words, such as *der Bus* and *der Kongress*, have been totally assimilated and only have the ending - es, e.g. *des Busses*, *des Kongresses*. In general, if a word has a regular German plural rather than an unusual foreign one (or as an alternative to it, see 1.2.5), it will take the genitive ending - es.

1.3.6 Declension of proper names and titles

(a) **Geographical names and proper names without titles or an**

article add - s in the genitive singular

Werner Faymans Politik
die Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs
Flüge innerhalb Deutschlands

Elisabeths Bücher
der Tod Friedrichs des Großen
Deutschlands Straßen

Personal names ending in - s, - *ß*, - x, - z do not add - s in the genitive. In writing an apostrophe may be used:

Fritz' Schwester, Agnes' Hut, Perikles' Tod, Marx' Einfluss

In speech, a construction with *von* is usual and can be used in writing as an alternative to the apostrophe, see also 2.4:

der Hut von Agnes, der Tod von Perikles, der Einfluss von Marx

With geographical names in - s, - *ß*, - x, - z, only a phrase with *von* is possible:

die Straßen von Paris

die Geschichte von Florenz

In everyday speech, especially in North Germany, the generic names of members of the family are often treated as names, e.g.:

Tantes Haus, Mutters Kleid, Vaters Geburtstag

The use of such nouns with simply the ending - s and a possessive pronoun (rather like English), e.g. *mein Vaters Team*, *bei meiner Toughters Computer* has been noted recently, but such usage is clearly not standard.

(b) Proper names do not usually have the ending - s in the genitive singular if they are used with an article

die Rolle des Egmont
die Werke eines Johann Sebastian Bach
die Bücher unseres kleinen Michael

die Gedichte des alten Goethe
die Briefe dieses Thomas Schmidt

(c) With geographical names used with an article the ending - (e) s is optional in the genitive singular

eines vereinigten Europa(s)	die Einwohner des geteilten Berlin(s)
die Kuppe des Feldberg(s)	die Ruinen des alten Rom(s)
an den Ufern des Nil(s)	

If the article is part of the name (e.g. with rivers), adding the ending is more usual, e.g. *an den Ufern des Rheins* (less frequent: *des Rhein*).

Foreign geographical names do not usually have an ending, e.g. *die Berge des High Peak*.

(d) Proper names with titles in the genitive singular

(i) If there is no article, only the name (or the last name) is declined:

König Heinrichs Politik	am Hof Kaiser Ottos des Großen
Onkel Roberts Haus	Bundeskanzler Schröders Amtsantritt
Hans Joachims neue Bücher	Tante Käthes Wohnung

(ii) If there is an article, only the title is declined:

die Siege des Kaisers Karl	die Hauptstadt des Landes Niedersachsen
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(iii) If the title is a weak masculine noun, the ending - *n* is optional:

Wir bedauern Genosse(n) Schmidts Versetzung nach Bautzen

However, *Herr* is always declined (see 1.3.2d), and a following title may then lack the ending - *s*: *der Vortrag des Herrn Generaldirektor(s) Kramer*.

(iv) *Doktor* and *Fräulei* *n*, used as titles, are never declined:

die Erfolge unseres Doktor Meyer	die Mutter dieses Fräulein Sauer
----------------------------------	----------------------------------

(e) Titles and names of books, plays, newspapers, hotels, companies

(i) These are fully declined in the appropriate case, e.g.:

ein Lied aus Schillers „Räubern“, aus Brechts „kaukasischem Kreidekreis“

Sie las es in der „Süddeutschen Zeitung“, im „Spiegel“

Ich wohne im „Goldenen Apostel“

(ii) After a word which describes what kind of thing it is, a full title in quotation marks remains in the nominative:

in Brechts Drama „Der kaukasische Kreidekreis“

im Hotel „Weißer Löwe“

in der Wochenzeitschrift „Der Spiegel“

(iii) A short title in the genitive with an article may drop the - (e)s:

in der letzten Strophe des Erlkönig(s)

(iv) Names of companies should always be declined in full:

der Überschuss bei der Süddeutschen Zucker-AG

die Verwaltung der ehemaligen Deutschen Reichsbahn

This rule is frequently ignored in practice.

2

Case

The grammatical category of CASE relates to the inflection of a NOUN, PRONOUN or NOUN PHRASE, i.e. changing the form of these by endings which show their function in the sentence or clause. German has four cases: NOMINATIVE, ACCUSATIVE, GENITIVE and DATIVE. All of these have a range of uses, as summarized in [Table 2.1](#).

[Table 2.1](#) Main uses of the German cases

Nominative	
marks the subject of the verb marks the complement of copular verbs like sein used with the noun in isolation	Der Fußballspieler schoss ein Tor <i>The football player shot a goal</i> Brecht war ein großer Dichter <i>Brecht was a great writer</i> Dein Freund, wann siehst du ihn wieder? <i>Your friend, when will you see him again?</i>
Accusative	
marks the direct object of the verb used after some prepositions	Ich kaufe einen großen Fernseher <i>I'm buying a big television</i> Sie tat es für ihren Bruder <i>She did it for her brother</i> Anita blieb den ganzen Tag

used in adverbial phrases, e.g. to mark distance or length of time used in conventional greetings and wishes	zu Hause <i>Anita stayed at home the whole day</i> Guten Abend! Herzlichen Glückwunsch! <i>Good evening.</i> <i>Congratulations!</i>
Genitive	
links nouns, e.g. to show possession used after some prepositions	Der Ton dieses Radios ist furchtbar <i>The sound of this radio is awful</i> Sie lief trotz ihres hohen Alters schnell <i>She ran fast despite her advanced age</i>
Dative	
marks the indirect object of the verb marks the sole (dative) object of some verbs can show possession, especially with clothing and parts of the body used after some prepositions used with many adjectives	Ich gebe dem Hamster sein Futter <i>I'm giving the hamster its food</i> Sie will ihrem Freund helfen <i>She wants to help her friend</i> Sie zogen dem Verletzten das Hemd aus <i>They took the injured man's shirt off</i> Wir suchten überall nach dem Geld <i>We looked everywhere for the money</i> Dieses Gespräch war mir sehr nützlich <i>This conversation was very useful for me</i>

Case is an area of the grammar where the differences between English and

German seem most striking. English only has case forms for the possessive in - s, e.g. my brother 's *bike* ~ das Fahrrad mein **es** Bruder **s**, and in a few pronouns which change to show the **subject** or the **object** of the verb, such as *I~me* and *she~her*. The function of parts of a sentence or clause are shown in other ways in English, typically by the word order. Compare:

The young man [subject] *has given* *his friend* [indirect object] *the suitcase* [direct object]

D **er** jung **e** Mann [nominative] hat sein **em** Freund [dative] d **en** Koffer [accusative] *gegeben*

In German the function of the noun phrases is shown by the endings, not the word order – which means that you can change the order round without changing the basic meaning (although the emphasis may be a little different), but if you change the order in English the meaning changes totally, e.g.:

His friend has given the young man the suitcase

Sein **em** Freund hat d **er** jung **e** Mann d **en** Koffer *gegeben*

We tell what is the subject of the verb in English by its position before the verb, but in German that information is in the ending (here for the nominative case: d **er** jung **e** Mann). In this way, inflection for case is vital for showing the structure of a German sentence (and understanding the sentence), and this is particularly apparent in relation to verb valency (see [Chapter 16](#)) and word order (see [Chapter 19](#)).

Further details on the use of the cases in German are given in the remainder of this chapter, as follows:

- the uses of the **nominative** case (section 2.1)
- the uses of the **accusative** case (section 2.2)
- the uses of the **genitive** case (section 2.3) and its replacement by **von** (section 2.4)
- the uses of the **dative** case (section 2.5)
- case use in **apposition** (section 2.6) and **measurement phrases** (section 2.7)

2.1 The nominative case

2.1.1 The nominative case marks the subject of the finite verb

This is the most important and characteristic function of the nominative case. The FINITE VERB has an ending which agrees with the subject, see 10.1.4:

Der Zug war nicht pünktlich	Heute war ausnahmsweise der Mittagszug nicht
Heute war der Zug nicht	pünktlich
pünktlich	

For more details see 16.2. As the subject is shown by the endings of the nominative case it does not have to precede the verb, as it does in English, see 19.2.

2.1.2 The nominative is used with nouns or pronouns in isolation

In this way it functions as a neutral case, used with nouns without any function in a sentence.

Ein schöner Tag heute, nicht?

Und dein Onkel, wann siehst du ihn wieder?

Und du, was meinst du dazu?

It is used in a similar way for persons and things addressed, and in exclamations:

Was beunruhigt dich, **mein Lieber** ?
Ach **du liebe Zeit** !

Herr Müller, Telefon für Sie!
Der unverschämte Kerl !

It is also used in so-called 'absolute' phrases, where the noun phrase is placed outside the main framework of the clause:

als er an den Mann dachte, zu dem er jetzt
gehen musste, **dieser Mann aus Röders**

*when he thought of the man he
now had to go to, that man from*

Abteilung (Seghers)	<i>Röder's company</i>
Er saß am Feuer, der Hund zu seinen Füßen	<i>He sat by the fire, (with) the dog at his feet</i>

The type of absolute phrase in the last example is found mainly in formal, especially literary German; other registers generally prefer a construction with *mit*, e.g. *mit dem Hund zu seinen Füßen*.

2.1.3 The nominative occurs in the predicate complement of some verbs

These are the so-called COPULAR VERBS, with a PREDICATE COMPLEMENT which describes the subject of the verb in some way. There are not many of these verbs, but they are very frequent, i.e. *sein*, *werden*, *bleiben*, *heißen* and *scheinen*:

Karl ist, wird, bleibt mein Freund	Ich will ein Schuft heißen
Er scheint ein großartiger Turner	Er wurde der Weise genannt

More information about these verbs and the predicate complement is given in section 16.6.

2.2 The accusative case

2.2.1 The accusative case marks the direct object of transitive verbs

This is the most important function of the accusative case. TRANSITIVE VERBS are those which have a DIRECT OBJECT, which is typically a person or thing directly affected by the action of the verb in some way. Further details are given in section 16.3.

Ich habe einen Salat gegessen	Die Putzfrau hat den Fußboden gebohnt
Sie hat mir den Inhalt erklärt	Er hat die Tauben im Park vergiftet

A very few verbs, e.g. *kosten* and *lehren*, take two objects in the accusative, see 16.3.3.

INTRANSITIVE VERBS, by contrast, are those which do not have a direct object in the accusative case. A few appear to be an exception to this definition, because they can sometimes be used with a following accusative noun phrase, e.g.:

Er starb **einen schweren Tod**

Sie schlief **den Schlaf** der Gerechten

This usage, however, is strictly limited to a specific noun phrase, called a ‘cognate’ accusative noun. Its meaning is related to that of the verb and it repeats or explains more fully the idea expressed by the verb.

2.2.2 The accusative case is used in some adverbial phrases

(a) A noun phrase in the accusative case can be used adverbially to indicate time

In these phrases the accusative case used without a preposition can indicate

- (i) a length of time lying entirely in the past, present or future. The accusative usually corresponds to an English phrase with ‘for’ (see 18.1.3c). The noun phrase in the accusative may be followed by *lang*, or, emphasizing the duration, *über* or *hindurch*:

Ich war einen Monat / drei Monate (lang) in Kassel	<i>I was in Kassel for a month/for three months</i>
Dort blieb sie viele Jahre (lang)	<i>She stayed there for many years</i>
Jahre hindurch blieb er im Gefängnis	<i>He stayed in prison for years (on end)</i>
Ich bin jede Woche einen Tag (lang) in Kaiserslautern	<i>I am in Kaiserslautern one day every week</i>
Er lag den ganzen Tag (lang/über) im Bett	<i>He lay in bed the whole day/all day (long)</i>

den ganzen Sommer (lang)
den ganzen Winter hindurch/über
sein ganzes Leben (lang)
Wo warst du die ganze Zeit ?
eine ganze Weile

*all summer, for the whole of the
summer
throughout the winter
all his life/for his whole life
Where were you the whole time?
for quite a while*

(ii) a specific time or period of time. In these contexts the usual English equivalent is a phrase with no preposition, e.g.:

Einen Augenblick zuvor hätte sie ihn
noch retten können
Er kommt jeden Tag / jede Woche
Sie fährt alle vierzehn Tage / alle paar
Jahre in die Schweiz
Jede halbe Stunde kommt er vorbei
Wir besuchen sie nächsten Dienstag /
kommenden Dienstag
Wir besuchen sie nächste / kommende
Woche
Wir werden dieses Jahr nicht verreisen
Sie ist 2011 wieder zur Vorsitzenden des
Vereins gewählt worden
Ich sah sie letzten Freitag / vorigen
Freitag / vergangenen Freitag

*A moment before she could still
have saved him
He comes every day/every week
She goes to Switzerland every two
weeks/every few years
Every half hour he comes past
We are visiting her next Tuesday
We are visiting her next week
We're not going away this year
In 2011 she was elected chair of
the society again
I saw her last Friday*

In many contexts a prepositional phrase can be used as an alternative to a phrase in the accusative case, as in these typical alternatives to the examples above:

am nächsten/kommenden Dienstag
am letzten/vorigen/vergangenen Freitag
in der nächsten/kommenden Woche
in diesem Jahr
im Jahre 2011

*next Tuesday
last Friday
next week
this year
in 2011*

Further information about the use of *an* and *in* in time phrases can be found in sections 18.3.2b and 18.3.7b. Phrases with the accusative case tend to be more

frequent in everyday speech, whereas those with a preposition are rather more common in writing.

Time phrases in the accusative can also be alternatives to phrases with other prepositions, e.g.:

Ich bin Mittag (or um Mittag) wieder zu Hause	<i>I'll be back home at noon</i>
Fährst du Ostern (or zu Ostern) zu deinen Eltern?	Are you going to your parents at Easter?
Sind Sie das erste Mal (or zum ersten Mal) hier?	<i>Is this the first time you've been here?</i>

The accusative is also used in dates in letters: *Essen, den 4. August*. Further information on usage in dates is given in section 8.5.3.

In time phrases the nouns *Anfang*, *Mitte* and *Ende* are used in the accusative case without a preposition:

Er ist Anfang Januar / Mitte Januar / Ende Januar gestorben	<i>He died at the beginning of January/in the middle of January/at the end of January</i>
Ich fahre schon Anfang / Ende nächster Woche	I'm leaving at the beginning/at the end of next week
Anfang 2009 fanden die Wahlen zum 18. hessischen Landtag statt	<i>The 18th regional elections in the state of Hesse took place at the beginning of 2009</i>

If *Anfang* and *Ende* are used without a following time phrase, they are preceded by *am*, e.g. **am Anfang** 'at the beginning', **am Ende** 'at the end'.

(b) A noun phrase in the accusative case can be used with verbs and adverbs denoting motion to indicate distance travelled

Ich bin den ganzen Weg zu Fuß gegangen	Sie kam den Berg herauf
Wir sind die Straße heruntergekommen	Sie kam die Treppe herunter

This adverbial accusative is particularly common with the direction adverbs formed with *hin-* and *her-* (see 7.2.4a).

(c) A noun phrase in the accusative case can be used with an appropriate adjective following to express a measurement or a value

Das ist **keinen Pfennig** wert
Das Kind ist **vier Jahre** alt

Der Tisch ist **ein(en) Meter** breit
Der Sack wiegt **einen Zentner**

2.2.3 Other uses of the accusative case

(a) Conventional greetings and wishes are in the accusative case

The accusative case with these is naturally only evident with masculine nouns:

Guten Morgen, Tag, Abend
Schönen Sonntag
Viel Vergnügen

Gute Nacht
Besten Dank
Gute Besserung

Guten Rutsch (ins neue Jahr)
Herzlichen Glückwunsch
Angenehme Reise

The accusative case is used as these phrases are in practice the direct objects of a verb like *wünschen*, which is understood.

(b) A few adjectives are used with the accusative case

e.g. *etwas gewohnt sein* ‘to be used to something’:

Als einstiger Skilehrer ist er sich **den**
Saisonbetrieb gewohnt (SGT)

*As a former ski instructor he is
used to seasonal work*

Further details on these adjectives are given in 6.3.2.

(c) The accusative case is sometimes used in ‘absolute’ phrases

Phrases like this typically describe a noun, e.g.:

Wilhelmine, den Kopf geneigt , erlaubt ihm, ihr Haar zu lösen (<i>Wolf</i>)	<i>Wilhelmine, her head bowed, allows him to untie her hair</i>
Den Bauch voller Fracht , fliegt der Jet nach Fernost (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>Its belly full of freight, the jet flies to the Far East</i>

This usage is largely restricted to formal or literary registers and is uncommon even there, with the more usual construction with *mit* often being preferred, e.g. *mit dem Bauch voller Fracht*.

(d) The accusative case is used with a number of prepositions

Information about these is given in sections 18.1 and 18.3.

2.3 The genitive case

In modern German the genitive case is characteristic of more formal, especially written registers, and it is often considered a symbolic marker of ‘best’ usage. However, it can sound affected in informal registers and other constructions are frequently preferred in everyday speech. This section outlines the current uses of the genitive with this general proviso.

Information about the contexts in which a phrase with *von* may be preferred to the genitive is given in section 2.4, and the use of the genitive case in measurement phrases is treated in section 2.7.

2.3.1 The main function of the genitive case is to link noun phrases

For this, English typically uses the preposition *of*. We often think of the genitive

as the ‘possessive’ case, but its range is wider, since it can be used:

to express possession	das Haus meines Bruders
as a partitive	die Hälfte des Kuchens
for the subject of a verbal noun	die Abfahrt des Zuges
for the object of a verbal noun	der Umbau des Hauses
to qualify a noun	ein Strahl der Hoffnung
to define a noun	die Pflicht der Dankbarkeit

2.3.2 The position of noun phrases in the genitive

A noun phrase in the genitive case usually **follows** the noun phrase on which it depends:

die Gefahr eines Erdbebens	das Rauschen der Bäume
-----------------------------------	-------------------------------

However, proper names in the genitive usually come first:

Karls Freund	Annas Stereoanlage	Frau Benders Haus
Heinrich Bölls Werke	Figaros Hochzeit	Deutschlands Grenzen

In written German, though, personal names without a title and geographical names can follow the noun phrase which they depend on:

ein Freund Karls	die Werke Heinrich Bölls	die Grenzen Deutschlands
-------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------

Otherwise, the genitive comes first only in old-fashioned literary usage, or in set phrases:

seiner Vorfahren großes altes Haus (<i>Th. Mann</i>)	<i>the large old house of his ancestors</i>
Undank ist der Welt Lohn	<i>Never expect thanks for anything</i>

In other contexts this order sounds ironic or facetious:

Podolski fordert doch immer Ruhe im Verein.	<i>Podolski does always demand</i>
---	------------------------------------

Dann wird er auch sicher **des Trainers**
Entscheidung akzeptieren (*forum.express.de*)

*quiet at the club. So he will
certainly accept the manager's
decision*

2.3.3 Other uses of the genitive case

(a) Some verbs take an object in the genitive case

There are very few of these in modern German, e.g. *bedürfen*, *gedenken*, *sich ermächtigen* and they are all restricted to formal written registers. Full details are given in section 16.7.

(b) Noun phrases in the genitive case after the verb *sein*

In a few fixed expressions a noun phrase in the genitive occurs as the predicate complement of *sein*. The following are still frequent:

Wir sind gleichen Alters	<i>We are of the same age</i>
Ich bin der Ansicht, dass ...	<i>I am of the view that ...</i>
Ich bin der Auffassung, dass ...	<i>I am of the opinion that ...</i>
Er ist guter Dinge	<i>He is in good spirits</i>
Wir waren guter/schlechter Laune	<i>We were in a good/bad mood</i>
Sie ist der Meinung, dass ...	<i>She is of the opinion that ...</i>
Dann sind wir des Todes	<i>Then we are doomed</i>
Sie sind der festen Überzeugung, dass ...	<i>They are firmly convinced that ...</i>
Das Wort ist griechischen Ursprungs	<i>The word is of Greek origin</i>

(c) The genitive case of nouns denoting time can refer to indefinite or habitual time

These are now mainly set expressions, and they are extended by adjectives only

in formal registers:

eines Tages	<i>one day</i>
eines schönen Tages	<i>one fine day</i>
eines Sonntags	<i>one Sunday</i>
eines Morgens	<i>one morning</i>
eines Sonntagmorgens	<i>one Sunday morning</i>
eines nebligen Morgens	<i>one foggy morning</i>
dieser Tage	<i>in the next/last few days</i>
eines Nachts	<i>one night</i>

Note the form *eines Nachts*, despite the fact that *die Nacht* is feminine.

Some genitive phrases have become simple adverbs, and they are written with a small initial letter:

morgens, vormittags	<i>in the mornings</i>
nachmittags, abends	<i>in the afternoons, in the evenings</i>
tags, nachts	<i>by day, at night</i>
dienstags, freitags	<i>on Tuesdays, on Fridays</i>
wochentags, werktags	<i>on weekdays, on working days</i>
donnerstagabends/donnerstags abends	<i>on Thursday evenings</i>
von morgens bis abends	<i>from morning till night</i>
sommers, winters	<i>in the summer, in the winter</i>
sommers wie winters	<i>all year round</i>

These adverbs are sometimes used to refer to single occasions (e.g. *nachmittags* for *am Nachmittage*), especially in South Germany, e.g.:

Wir kamen dort sonntags auf dem Spaziergang vorüber (<i>Gaiser</i>)	<i>We came past there on Sunday during our walk</i>
---	---

The adverbs *morgens*, *abends*, etc. originated from noun phrases in the genitive with the definite article, e.g. *des Morgens*, *des Abends*, and these full phrases are still sometimes used in formal writing.

(d) A few other noun phrases in the genitive are used adverbially as fixed expressions

unverrichteter Dinge	<i>without achieving anything</i>
letzten Endes	after all
meines Erachtens (<i>abbrev.: m.E.</i>)	in my view
allen Ernstes	in all seriousness
stehenden Fußes (<i>lit.</i>)	immediately
gesenkten/erhobenen Hauptes	with one's head bowed/raised
leichten/schweren Herzens	with a light/heavy heart
Sie fährt erster Klasse	She is travelling first class
seines Weges gehen (<i>lit.</i>)	to go on one's way
meines Wissens (<i>abbrev.: m.W.</i>)	<i>to my knowledge</i>

(e) A few adjectives are used with the genitive case

A construction with *of* is a frequent English equivalent for these:

Er ist einer solchen Tat nicht fähig	<i>He is not capable of such a deed</i>
---	---

Further details of these adjectives are given in section 6.3.3.

(f) The genitive case is used after a few prepositions

e.g. *innerhalb, statt, trotz, während, wegen*. Information about these is given in section 18.4.

2.4 Genitive case or *von*?

Using the genitive case where appropriate is the norm in written German, and it is considered very much as a mark of 'best' style. However, it is less frequent in colloquial speech, except with names (e.g. *Ruths Buch, Peters Fahrrad*), and a

prepositional phrase with *von* is often preferred, e.g.:

colloquial speech:	das Dach vom Haus, der Ring von seiner Frau
written German:	das Dach des Hauses, der Ring seiner Frau

Even in written German, though, there are contexts where the genitive is not possible and where the paraphrase with *von* **must** be used, and there are some other contexts where this paraphrase is considered an acceptable alternative to the genitive in writing. This section gives information about the contexts where the paraphrase with *von* must or can be used in written German. In other contexts it is typical of colloquial speech and avoided in writing.

2.4.1 Contexts in which a phrase with *von* must be used in writing

(a) if a noun stands by itself or is used with a word which does not decline

i.e. with a determiner which has no ending or with a numeral

der Bau von Kraftwerken	<i>the building of power stations</i>
die Wirkung von wenig Wein	<i>the effect of a little wine</i>
der Preis von fünf Fahrrädern	<i>the price of five bicycles</i>
ein Strahl von Hoffnung	<i>a ray of hope</i>

(b) with a descriptive phrase

eine Frau von bezaubernder Höflichkeit	<i>a woman of enchanting politeness</i>
ein Ereignis von weltgeschichtlicher Bedeutung	<i>an event of global historical significance</i>

(c) with personal pronouns

The genitive forms of personal pronouns are rarely used, see 3.1.2:

fünf **von euch**
ein Freund **von ihr**

five of you
a friend of hers

(d) in partitive constructions with *viel*, *wenig* and indefinite pronouns

viel/wenig **von dem**, was sie sagte
etwas **von ihrem** Charme
welches **von diesen** Büchern ?
nichts **von diesem** Zauber

much / little of what she said
something of her charm
which of those books?
nothing of this magic

2.4.2 Contexts in which a phrase with *von* may be used in writing

In these contexts it is equally acceptable to use a phrase with *von* or the genitive case in written German.

(a) to avoid consecutive genitive noun phrases in - (e) s

der Turm von dem Palast des Königs	}	<i>the tower of the king's palace</i>
der Turm des Palastes des Königs		

Consecutive genitive noun phrases are considered inelegant, especially if both nouns have the ending - (e)s, but they are not unknown, e.g.:

die Existenz eines Verdachts eines Verstoßes gegen den Atomsperrvertrag (SZ)	<i>the existence of a suspected violation of the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty</i>
--	---

(b) if a noun is qualified by an adjective with no article

der Bau von modernen Kraftwerken	}	<i>the building of modern power stations</i>
der Bau moderner Kraftwerke		

There is also a clear preference for a phrase with *von* in these contexts if the first noun is qualified by an indefinite article, e.g.:

ein fader Geruch von aufgewärmten Speisen	<i>an insipid smell of warmed-up</i>
(Zweig)	<i>food</i>

(c) with nouns qualified by indefinite pronouns

die Ansicht von vielen Politikern	}	<i>the view of many politicians</i>
die Ansicht vieler Politiker		

(d) in most partitive constructions

i.e. following number words (except those listed at 2.4.1d):

eines von den wenigen alten Häusern	}	<i>one of the few old houses</i>
eines der wenigen alten Häuser		
viele von meinen Freunden	}	<i>many of my friends</i>
viele meiner Freunde		
zwei von ihren Kindern	}	<i>two of her children</i>
zwei ihrer Kinder		

(e) With geographical names which have no article

die Zerstörung von Dresden	}	<i>the destruction of Dresden</i>
die Zerstörung Dresdens		
die Hauptstadt von Deutschland	}	<i>the capital of Germany</i>
die Hauptstadt Deutschlands		

In German, no preposition is used with geographical names, e.g. *die Stadt Leipzig*, *die Universität Freiburg*, see 2.6c.

2.5 The dative case

The dative case has **the widest range of all the German cases**, with many idiomatic uses. It is used

- as the **indirect** or **sole object** of a verb (section 2.5.1)
- as a **‘free’ dative** with other verbs (section 2.5.2)
- to indicate **possession** (section 2.5.3)
- with many **adjectives** (section 2.5.4)
- after some **prepositions** (section 2.5.5)

In all these contexts except after prepositions it typically marks a person or persons (rather than a thing) in some way concerned or affected, if not necessarily very directly, by the action or the event expressed in the verb.

2.5.1 The dative case as the object of a verb

(a) The dative case marks the indirect object of transitive verbs

The INDIRECT OBJECT typically indicates the person who is in receipt of the direct object of the verb, and it is a characteristic of verbs of giving and receiving or the like that they have an indirect as well as a direct object. In German such indirect objects are in the dative case, whereas in English the indirect object is marked by the word order or by a phrase introduced by *to*:

Ich zeigte dem Polizisten meinen Führerschein	<i>I showed the policeman my driving licence/ I showed my driving licence to the policeman</i>
Ich habe meinem Freund das Buch geliehen	<i>I have lent my friend the book/ I have lent the book to my friend</i>

For more information about indirect objects see section 16.4.1.

(b) Many verbs take a sole object in the dative case

These are intransitive verbs which cannot be followed by a direct object in the accusative case, but only by a dative object. The English equivalents are most often simple transitive verbs, e.g.:

Er dankte seiner Tante für ihre Hilfe	<i>He thanked his aunt for her help</i>
Der Einbrecher hat dem alten Mann mit einer Pistole gedroht	<i>The burglar threatened the old man with a pistol</i>

Further verbs like this are *dienen*, *folgen*, *gratulieren*, *helfen* and *schmeicheln*. More information about them is given in section 16.4.2.

2.5.2 'Free' datives

The dative case is often used to mark a person (rarely a thing) affected in some way by the action or event expressed by the verb, especially with verbs which denote an activity, in particular moving and making things, or which indicate a change of state. These uses of the dative case are often referred to as '**free**' datives. However, the difference between some of these uses and the typical dative objects dealt with in 2.5.1 is by no means clear-cut, except that the dative case with these verbs is rarely a grammatical requirement.

Various types of 'free' datives have been identified, but there are certain similarities between them all (and between them and the possessive dative, see 2.5.3). Some are idiomatic and lack a clear equivalent in English.

(a) The dative case can indicate a person on whose behalf the action is done

- (i) This is sometimes called the '**dative of advantage**' or the '**benefactive**' dative. It often corresponds to an English phrase with 'for':

Sie schrieb mir seine Adresse auf	<i>She wrote his address down for me I opened the door for her</i>
Ich habe ihr die Tür geöffnet Er füllte meinem Vater das Glas	<i>He filled the glass for my father/my father's glass</i>

(ii) It is sometimes used with things, especially things being altered, repaired or improved:

Sie setzt dem Auto einen neuen Motor ein	<i>She's putting a new engine in the car</i>
--	--

(iii) In this 'benefactive' sense a dative reflexive pronoun can be used if a physical action is involved. This is very frequent in everyday speech:

Ich will mir das Buch anschauen	<i>I want to go and look at that book</i>
--	---

(iv) In many of these contexts a phrase with *für* can be used rather than the dative case:

Er will mir Blumen/Blumen für mich kaufen	<i>He's going to buy some flowers for me</i>
Ich habe ihr die Tür/die Tür für sie geöffnet	<i>I opened the door for her</i>

The construction with *für* may be preferred if the dative is ambiguous. For instance, *Er hat seinem Vater* einen Brief geschrieben could mean 'to his father' or 'for his father', whereas *Er hat für seinen Vater* einen Brief geschrieben is quite clear.

(b) The dative case can indicate a person who is disadvantaged by the action

This 'dative of disadvantage' characteristically indicates a person who is affected by something undesirable happening to the person or thing which is the subject or direct object of the verb:

Mir ist Großmutter's Vase kaputtgegangen *Grandmother's vase broke on me*

(c) The dative case can mark a person from whose standpoint an action is being judged

This usage typically involves an adjective qualified by *zu* or *genug*:

Mir verging die Zeit *zu* schnell *I felt that the time was passing too quickly*
Fährt sie **dir** schnell genug? *Is she driving fast enough for you?*

A similar dative of the person concerned is frequent with the verb *sein* and a noun. In such cases, English uses a phrase with 'to' or 'for':

Das Wiedersehen mit dir war **mir** ein *It was a pleasure for me to see you again*
 Vergnügen
Dem Schüler war diese Zensur ein *This mark was a consolation to / for the*
 Trost *schoolboy*

(d) The so-called 'ethic dative' indicates the speaker's emotional involvement

It is only found with the first person, in commands or exclamations:

Dann soll **mir** mal so einer *Just let me catch one like that coming*
 vorbeikommen! *past!*
Seid **mir** doch nett! *Be nice, for my sake!*

2.5.3 The dative of possession

(a) The dative case is often used to indicate possession

This is especially frequent with **parts of the body** or **articles of clothing**, but it is also found with close relatives and prized possessions (like vehicles or houses). The definite article is used rather than a possessive determiner (see 4.6), and the dative typically comes before the item possessed:

Einem Mann ist das Bein gebrochen worden (FR)	<i>One man's leg was broken</i>
Mir muss der Mund offen geblieben sein (<i>Borst</i>)	<i>My mouth must have hung open</i>
Dem Alten ist gerade die Frau gestorben	<i>The old man's wife has just died</i>
Das Kind ist mir vors Auto gelaufen	<i>The child ran in front of my car</i>

If the possessor is the subject of the sentence, a reflexive pronoun in the dative case is used. This may be optional if no ambiguity is involved about who the item in question belongs to:

Er wischte sich den Schweiß von der Stirn	<i>He wiped the sweat from his brow</i>
Willst du (dir) den grünen Pullover anziehen?	<i>Are you going to put your green pullover on?</i>

There is some variation in the use of the possessive dative, but the following guidelines apply:

- (i) It is not used if no-one else could possibly do it to one or for one:

Er machte die Augen auf	<i>He opened his eyes</i>
Sie hob den Arm	<i>She raised her arm</i>
Er nickte mit dem Kopf	<i>He nodded his head</i>

- (ii) It **must** be used if the body part or article of clothing is used with a preposition (other than *mit*):

Ich habe mir in den Finger geschnitten	<i>I've cut my finger</i>
Die Mütze fiel mir vom Kopf	<i>The cap fell off my head</i>
Regen tropfte mir auf den Hut	<i>Rain was falling on my hat</i>

(iii) It **must** be used if reference is not to the subject of the sentence:

Die Mutter wäscht ihm die Hände	<i>His mother is washing his hands</i>
Wir zogen dem Verletzten die Hose aus	<i>We took the injured man's trousers off</i>

(b) Differences between using the dative and a possessive construction

Possession can also be indicated by using a genitive phrase or a possessive determiner like *sein* or *mein*, but if the dative is used rather than a possessive construction, the person is seen as affected by the action as well. Compare:

Regen tropfte ihm auf den Hut	<i>(he was wearing it and getting wet)</i>
Regen tropfte auf seinen Hut	<i>(he wasn't necessarily wearing it)</i>
Sie strich dem Jungen übers Gesicht	<i>(normal for: 'she ran her hand over the boy's face')</i>
Sie strich über das Gesicht des Jungen	<i>(only possible if the boy is dead or unconscious)</i>
Er zog ihr die Jacke an	<i>He helped her on with her jacket</i>
Er zog sich ihre Jacke an	<i>He put her jacket on</i>

(c) The use of the accusative or the dative to indicate possession of parts of the body

With some verbs the accusative case is an alternative to the dative case to indicate possession of parts of the body. If the accusative is used, the whole person is seen as more directly affected:

Der Hund biss ihm/ihn ins Bein	Ich klopfte ihm/ihn auf die Schulter
Alle Glieder schmerzten ihm/ihn	

With the following verbs, the accusative and dative are equally common:

beißen küssen schmerzen stechen stoßen zwicken

With these the accusative is possible, but the dative is more common:

hauen klopfen schießen schlagen schneiden treten

(d) In colloquial speech a phrase in the dative case is often used to indicate possession

This construction is very widespread in everyday speech, but it is heavily stigmatized as non-standard. It can only be used if the possessor is a person:

Das ist **meiner Mutter** ihr Hut
Meinem Onkel sein Garten ist ganz groß
Dem Huck Finn sein Vater (*Andersch*)

That's my mother's hat
My uncle's garden is quite big
Huck Finn's father

2.5.4 Other uses of the dative case

(a) The dative case is often used with noun phrases which depend on adjectives

e.g. *Er ist seinem Bruder* sehr ähnlich. The dative is the most common case used with adjectives, and full details are given in section 6.3.1.

(b) Adjectives with *zu* or *genug* may govern a dative case or a phrase with *für*

A phrase with *für* can come before or after the adjective, but the dative always precedes it:

Diese Uhr ist **mir** zu teuer/ **für mich** zu teuer/zu teuer **für mich**

That watch is too expensive for me

Dieser Mantel ist **mir** nicht warm genug/ **für mich** nicht warm genug/nicht warm genug **für mich**

That coat is not warm enough for me

(c) The dative case with *sein* and *werden* and adjectives expressing sensations

With a number of adjectives which express a sensation used with the verbs *sein* and *werden*, German typically puts the person who is experiencing the sensation into the dative case in an impersonal construction. In English the person is typically the subject of the verb:

Es ist mir kalt/ Mir ist kalt	<i>I am cold</i>
Ist dir warm genug?	Are you warm enough?
Ihm wurde plötzlich schwindlig	<i>He suddenly felt dizzy</i>

For the omission of *es*, see 16.2.4e. This construction is used with the following adjectives:

bange	heiß	schlecht	übel	(un)wohl
gut	kalt	schwindlig	warm	

English learners need to be aware that *Ich bin kalt* or *Ich bin warm*, etc. are **never** used to mean ‘I am cold’ or ‘I am warm’, etc. Indeed, they can sometimes have a quite different meaning, so that, for example, in colloquial speech, *Er ist warm* commonly means ‘He is gay’.

(d) The dative case is used with a number of prepositions

Information about these is given in sections 18.2 and 18.3.

2.6 Apposition

A noun phrase is said to be ‘**in apposition**’ to another noun phrase if it immediately follows and gives some additional information about it, e.g.:

Wilhelm, der letzte deutsche Kaiser

Berlin, die Hauptstadt der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

Comparative phrases introduced by *als* and *wie* are also normally ‘in apposition’ to the noun they qualify, and the rules given below apply to them as well:

ein Tag **wie jeder andere** Er gilt **als großer Staatsmann** Jürgen ist größer **als du**

Apposition in measurement phrases is dealt with in section 2.7.

(a) Noun phrases in apposition have the same case as the noun which they describe

Es spricht Herbert Werner, der Vorsitzende des Vereins in Michelstadt, einem kleinen Städtchen im Odenwald 6,8 Prozent der Frauen empfinden die Arbeitslosigkeit als einen Makel (LV) der „Mythos der Schweiz“ als eines Landes mit vier Landessprachen (NZZ) für Heinrich Böll als gläubigen Katholiken nach einem Tag wie diesem	<i>The speaker is Herbert Werner, the</i> <i>chairman of the society</i> in Michelstadt, a little town in the Odenwald 6.8% of women feel that being unemployed is a stigma The ‘myth of Switzerland’ as a country with four national languages for Heinrich Böll as a devout Catholic <i>after a day like this</i>
--	--

(b) There are some exceptions to this general rule

The rule that noun phrases in apposition are in the same case is generally followed in both spoken and written German. However, a few exceptions are common:

- (i) After a genitive, an noun in apposition with no determiner or adjective is usually in the nominative:

nach dem Tod meines Onkels, Bürgermeister der Stadt Krefeld	<i>after the death of my uncle, the</i> <i>mayor of the town of Krefeld</i>
---	--

(ii) In dates a weekday introduced by *am* may be followed by the date in the dative **or** the accusative:

am Montag, **dem** 7. September 2015 *or* am Montag, **den** 7. September 2015

(iii) If the phrase in apposition has an adjective, but no determiner, then the nominative can be used:

Sie informierte auch Uwe Rösler, **Technischen Direktor** / **Technischer Direktor** des Betriebs

In practice, the nominative occasionally occurs in other contexts, as a kind of neutral possibility.

(iv) The dative is sometimes used instead of other cases:

nach dem Tod meines Onkels, **dem früheren Bürgermeister dieser Stadt**
die Wirtsleute des „Birnbaumes“, **einem kleinen Dorfhaus** (BZ)

Der Präsident begrüßte Walter Keller, **dem Minister** für
Entwicklungshilfe

However, this use of the dative in such contexts is not generally accepted as standard.

(v) The genitive case is regularly used after a phrase with *von*:

Sacramento ist die Hauptstadt von Kalifornien, **des reichsten Bundesstaates**

(c) German often uses appositional constructions with geographical names

die Insel Rügen

die Universität Hamburg

die Stadt Bremen

In constructions like these, English typically uses ‘of’, e.g. ‘the University of Hamburg’, ‘the city of Bremen’, etc.

With names of battles, German uses *bei* for English *of*, e.g. *die Schlacht bei Lützen* ‘the battle of Lützen’.

2.7 Measurement phrases: genitive, von or apposition?

There is much variation and uncertainty in respect of case usage in measurement phrases, and this section gives detail on the most frequent accepted or widely used alternatives. For the use of singular nouns in measurement phrases, e.g. *zwei Pfund Kirschen*, see 1.2.8.

2.7.1 Noun phrases after a noun of measurement

(a) A noun phrase after a noun of measurement is normally treated as being in apposition to it

i.e. it is put in the same case (see 2.6):

eine Flasche Wein	<i>a bottle of wine</i>
eine Flasche deutscher Wein	a bottle of German wine
er kauft zwei Flaschen deutschen Wein	he is buying two bottles of German wine
mit einer Tasse heiem Tee	with a cup of hot tea
von vier Kilo grünen Erbsen	<i>of four kilograms of green peas</i>

In spoken German it is not uncommon to hear datives for accusatives and vice versa, e.g. *Er kauft zwei Flaschen deutschem Wein, mit einer Tasse heißen Tee*. This is considered incorrect in writing.

(b) The genitive case is sometimes used in measurement phrases

eine Flasche sommerabendlichen Dufts (Süßkind)	<i>a bottle of the perfume of a summer evening</i>
zehn Jahre treuer Mitarbeit	<i>ten years' faithful service</i>

This alternative **only** occurs in the sequence: noun of measurement + adjective + noun. In the masculine and neuter singular it sounds rather literary and is restricted to formal writing, but it is not uncommon in the plural in spoken German.

(c) Usage when the noun of measurement is in the dative case

Here usage is particularly uncertain and variable, and the following alternatives are current and equally acceptable:

(i) After nouns of measurement in - *er*, e.g. *Zentner* 'hundredweight', *Liter*, *Meter*, etc., the dative plural ending -*n* can be attached to these rather than to the following noun:

mit zwei Zentner **n** Äpfel *or* mit zwei Zentner Äpfel **n**

(ii) If the following noun is plural, it can be in the dative or the nominative, i.e. it may lack the ending -*n* of the dative plural:

mit einem Haufen Butterbrote(n)	<i>with a pile of sandwiches</i>
mit einem Dutzend Kühe(n)	<i>with a dozen cows</i>

(iii) If the following noun has an adjective with it there is a range of acceptable possibilities.

If the following noun is singular, it can have the 'weak' adjective ending - *en* **or** the 'strong' ending - *em*:

von einem Pfund gekochten Schinken	} <i>of a pound of cooked ham</i>
von einem Pfund gekochtem Schinken	

If the following noun is plural, it can be in the genitive. This means that all three of the following alternatives are acceptable:

mit einem Strauß rote Rosen (*nominative*)

mit einem Strauß roten Rosen (*dative*)

mit einem Strauß roter Rosen (*genitive*)

(d) Usage in contexts where the noun of measurement is in the genitive case

In these contexts a phrase with *von* is **always** used, e.g.:

der Preis von einem Pfund gekochtem/gekochten Schinken

in order to avoid consecutive genitives in - (e)s, i.e. *der Preis eines Pfundes gekochten Schinkens*.

2.7.2 Noun phrases after words of rather vague quantity

e.g. *die Anzahl, die Gruppe, der Haufen, die Schar, die Reihe, die Sorte*. Usage with these varies according to whether the following noun has an adjective with it.

(a) If the following noun has an adjective with it (or is an adjective used as a noun)

Here the following noun is most often in the genitive case in written German, but a phrase with *von* may be used (as it almost always is in speech):

zwei Gruppen **junger Arbeiter**
große Mengen **neuer Autos**
eine Reihe **ernsthafter Probleme**
die wachsende Anzahl

or zwei Gruppen **von jungen Arbeitern**
or große Mengen **von neuen Autos**
or eine Reihe **von ernsthaften Problemen**
or die wachsende Anzahl **von**

(b) If these words are followed by a single noun

Normal usage is a phrase with *von*, although apposition is also possible:

eine Art **(von) Museum** eine Anzahl **(von) Touristen**

eine große Menge **(von) Handys**

2.7.3 Noun phrases after nouns of number

i.e. *das Dutzend, das Hundert, das Tausend, die Million, die Milliarde*. If these are used in the plural without a preceding numeral, they are followed by a phrase with *von*:

Dutzende von Anfragen Tausende von Briten Millionen von Menschen

If the following noun has an adjective with it, all three alternatives are acceptable, i.e. they can be followed by any of:

a phrase with *von*: Tausende/tausende **von jungen Arbeitern**

a phrase in the genitive case: Tausende/tausende **junger Arbeiter**

a phrase in apposition: Tausende/tausende **junge Arbeiter**

In such contexts, *Dutzend, Hundert* and *Tausend* can be spelled with an initial capital **or** a small letter, see 8.1.5c.

If they are used in the singular **or** the plural with a numeral, the following noun is usually in apposition, less commonly in the genitive:

zwei Millionen hungernde(r) Menschen
ein Dutzend Eier

Allein im Bahnhof kam es im Februar zu
mehr als einem Dutzend

two million starving people
a dozen eggs

*Just in the station there were more
than a dozen pickpocket thefts in*

Taschendiebstählen (MM)

February

Personal pronouns

PRONOUNS are a limited ('closed') set of small words which stand in place of NOUNS or NOUN PHRASES. In particular they stand for nouns or noun phrases which have already been mentioned or which are so well known to the speaker and the listener that they do not need to be repeated in full. Pronouns are used in the same grammatical contexts as nouns or noun phrases and thus, in German, they change their form to indicate the same grammatical categories as nouns, i.e. CASE, NUMBER and GENDER.

There are a number of different types of pronoun, and most of them are treated in [Chapter 5](#). This chapter explains the forms and uses of the **PERSONAL PRONOUNS**, i.e. those which refer to:

- the speaker(s), i.e. English *I* and *we* – the **FIRST PERSON**
- the person(s) addressed, i.e. English *you* – the **SECOND PERSON**
- other person(s) or thing(s) mentioned, i.e. English *he*, *she*, *it* and *they* – the **THIRD PERSON**

The personal pronouns have different forms to show plural, case and, in the third person, gender. These forms are given in [Table 3.1](#).

[Table 3.1](#) Personal pronouns

Person				Nominative	Accusative	Genitive	Dative
Singular	1st			ich /	mich	meiner	mir
	2nd			du you	dich	deiner	dir
	3rd	masculine		er he/it	ihn	seiner	ihm
		feminine		sie she/it	sie	ihrer	ihr
		neuter		es it	es	seiner	ihm
Plural	1st			wir we	uns	unser	uns
	2nd	familiar		ihr you	euch	euer	euch
		polite (sg./pl.)		Sie you	Sie	Ihrer	Ihnen
	3rd			sie they	sie	ihrer	ihnen

This chapter gives information on:

- the forms of the **personal pronouns** (section 3.1)
- **reflexive** and **reciprocal pronouns** (section 3.2)
- the use of the **second person pronouns** *du*, *ihr* and *Sie* (section 3.3)
- the uses of the **third person pronouns** (section 3.4)
- the **prepositional adverb** (section 3.5)
- special uses of the **pronoun** *es* (section 3.6)

3.1 The forms of the personal pronouns

3.1.1 The declension of the personal pronouns

The forms of the personal pronouns given in [Table 3.1](#) are those which are the norm in writing. However, there are a number of frequent variations in everyday speech.

(a) In everyday speech reduced forms are usual

Personal pronouns are naturally weakly stressed, so that in casual speech they tend to be very heavily reduced, e.g.:

'ch soll 's'm geben

for

Ich soll es ihm geben

Jetzt kannst e'n sehen

for

Jetzt kannst **du ihn** sehen

Particularly frequent are contractions with the common verbs *sein* and *haben*, e.g. *hammer?* for *haben wir?*; see also 10.2.2a. This kind of reduction is hardly ever seen in written German, with the exception of 's for *es*, which is quite common in written dialogue and poetry.

(b) In casual rapid speech, the subject pronouns *ich*, *du* and *es* are often omitted entirely

Such omissions are only very occasionally seen in written German, to represent colloquial dialogue.

(Ich) weiß's nicht Kannst (du) morgen kommen? (Es) scheint zu klappen

(c) In South Germany *mir* is commonly heard for *wir*

This is a non-standard regionalism but it is almost universal in everyday speech in the South.

Mir gehen jetzt ins Kino

for

Wir gehen jetzt ins Kino

3.1.2 The genitive of the personal pronouns

(a) The genitive forms of the personal pronouns are only used in very formal registers

mittels einer Passbildaufnahme **seiner** selbst
(Grass)

Ist die Politik erst einmal auf die Straße verlegt,
dann wird sich die Straße **ihrer** annehmen (OH)

*by means of a passport
photograph of himself
If politics is moved onto the
streets, the streets will take it*

Even in writing, these forms can sound stilted, and alternative constructions are often preferred:

- (i) With verbs, an alternative construction or a different verb can be used (for further information, see 16.7):

Erinnern Sie sich **an mich** (*rarely*: meiner)

Er braucht mich nicht (*rarely*: Er bedarf meiner nicht)

- (ii) After prepositions (see 18.4) the dative case is used in speech:

wegen **uns**, trotz **ihnen**, statt **ihm** (*or* an seiner Stelle)

The dative is also not uncommon in writing, although formal standard German still prefers the genitive. To refer to things, the adverbs *stattdessen*, *trotzdem*, *währenddessen* and *deswegen* are used rather than the preposition with a pronoun.

- (iii) After the prepositions which have alternative constructions with *von* (see 18.4.3b) the prepositional adverb *davon* (see 3.5) is used rather than a pronoun in the genitive, e.g. *innerhalb davon*, *unweit davon*. Alternatively, the prepositions may be used on their own, as adverbs: *außerhalb* ‘outside (it)’, *jenseits* ‘on the other side (of it)’.

- (iv) In other contexts, *von* is used (see 2.4.1c):

sechs **von ihnen**, drei **von euch**, ein Freund **von mir**

(b) The genitive personal pronouns usually only refer to persons or animals

Ich bedarf **seiner** nicht

I don't need him

The demonstratives *dessen* or *deren* are used to refer to things:

Ich bedarf **dessen** nicht

I don't need it

Nevertheless, this usage is not absolutely fixed, and personal pronouns are occasionally used to refer to things:

Er lässt seinen Autoschlüssel im
Küchenschrank, so dass andere
Familienmitglieder sich **seiner** bedienen
können (MM)

*He leaves his car key in the kitchen
cupboard so that other members of
the family can use it*

(c) Genitive personal pronouns with *wegen*, *um ... willen* and *-halben*

Special forms of the genitive personal pronoun are used with these prepositions, and compounded with an intervening *t*, e.g.:

meinet wegen, **deinet** wegen, um **ihret** willen, um **unsert** willen, **seinet** halben

(d) The genitive forms *mein*, *dein* and *sein* are archaic

They have been replaced in modern German by *meiner*, *deiner* and *seiner*, but they are sometimes still used for stylistic effect:

Man gedachte **sein** (*for: seiner*) nicht mehr

3.2 Reflexive and reciprocal pronouns

3.2.1 Forms of the reflexive pronoun

[Table 3.2](#) The reflexive pronoun

Accusative		Dative		
ich setze	mich	ich bilde	mir	das ein
du setzt	dich	du bildest	dir	das ein
er/sie/es setzt	sich	er/sie/es bildet	sich	das ein
wir setzen	uns	wir bilden	uns	das ein
ihr setzt	euch	ihr bildet	euch	das ein
Sie setzen	sich	Sie bilden	sich	das ein
sie setzen	sich	sie bilden	sich	das ein
setz	dich!	bilde	dir	das ein!
setzt	euch!	bildet	euch	das ein!
setzen Sie	sich!	bilden Sie	sich	das ein!

The REFLEXIVE PRONOUN is a personal pronoun which refers back to the subject of the sentence or clause, e.g. *Ich wasche **mich*** ‘I wash myself’, *Sie wäscht **sich*** ‘She washes herself’. In German it has a special form **sich** which is used in the accusative and dative cases for the third person (singular and plural), and for the ‘polite’ second person. In the first and second persons, the personal pronouns given in [Table 3.1](#) are used as reflexive pronouns.

The German reflexive pronoun is much more frequent than English forms in -**self**, in particular with certain verbs which are mainly used with a reflexive pronoun – the so-called REFLEXIVE VERBS (see 16.3.5 and 16.4.3). [Table 3.2](#) gives the forms of the reflexive pronoun with the present tense and the imperative of two ‘reflexive’ verbs, **sich setzen** ‘sit down’ and **sich (das) einbilden** ‘imagine (that)’. This shows the reflexive pronoun in the accusative and dative cases.

3.2.2 Uses of the reflexive pronoun

(a) The reflexive pronoun used after a preposition refers back to the subject of the verb

Er hatte kein Geld bei **sich**

He had no money on him

Sie schlossen die Tür hinter **sich**

They closed the door behind them

The reflexive pronoun can also refer back to a dative object denoting a person with verbs whose dative object is the equivalent of an English subject (see 16.2.4d):

Ihm gefallen Geschichten über **sich**

He likes stories about himself

(b) The reflexive pronoun in infinitive constructions without *zu*

In these contexts it may not always be clear who the reflexive pronoun refers to. However, it usually refers back to the DIRECT OBJECT of the finite verb:

Er hörte seinen Freund **sich** tadeln

He heard his friend blaming himself

Er ließ den Gefangenen **sich** ausziehen

He made the prisoner get undressed

On the other hand, a non-reflexive pronoun refers back to the SUBJECT of the finite verb:

Er hörte seinen Freund **ihn** tadeln

He heard his friend blaming him

Er ließ den Gefangenen **ihn** ausziehen

He made the prisoner undress him

After a preposition a reflexive pronoun also refers back to the **subject** of the finite verb:

Peter sah eine dunkle Gestalt **vor sich**
auftauchen

*Peter saw a dark shape appear in front
of him*

Eva ließ mich **bei sich** wohnen

Eva let me live at her place

(c) The use of the reflexive pronoun in infinitive clauses with *zu*

In these the choice of pronoun depends on who is understood to be the SUBJECT of the infinitive (see 11.2.3):

possible alternative after prepositions, when it is written together with the preposition, e.g. *durcheinander*, *miteinander*:

Sie sahen sich (or einander) oft	<i>They often saw each other</i>
Wir gehen uns (or einander) aus dem Wege	We avoid each other
Wir verlassen uns aufeinander	We rely on each other
Sie sprachen voneinander but Sie sprachen von sich	They were talking about each other <i>They were talking about themselves</i>

If the reflexive pronoun is ambiguous, *selbst* can be added to confirm that the sense is reflexive, or *gegenseitig* to show that it is reciprocal:

Sie widersprachen sich selbst	<i>They contradicted themselves</i>
Sie widersprachen sich gegenseitig (or Sie widersprachen einander)	<i>They contradicted each other</i>

3.3 Pronouns of address

English only has a single **second person pronoun** ‘you’, but like most other European languages **German makes a distinction** between FAMILIAR and POLITE pronouns, i.e. on the one hand singular *du* and plural *ihr*, and on the other *Sie*, which is used for both singular and plural.

Since the loss of the old form *thou*, English has lacked any distinction of this kind, and English-speaking learners of German need to establish which is appropriate in context. The use of these pronouns is anchored in social convention, and it is important for English learners to realize that these conventions can be very different from those in the English-speaking world. Since the late 1960s the use of *du* and *Sie* (commonly referred to as *duzen* and *siezen*) has shifted with changing social attitudes, and the use of *du* has become more widespread, particularly among younger people. However, these changes

have created considerable uncertainty, and Germans nowadays can often feel insecure about which one to use in unfamiliar surroundings or with new acquaintances. However, **consciousness of the need to use the ‘right’ pronoun is still very strong.**

Essentially, ***du* signals intimacy, affection and solidarity.** People who use *du* to one another are conscious of belonging to the same group or standing together, whereas ***Sie* signals a degree of social distance and, perhaps above all, respect** (rather than just ‘politeness’). Thus, in the ‘wrong’ situation *du* sounds disrespectful, intrusive of personal privacy and even offensive, and in extreme cases it can be such a gross insult that people have been prosecuted for using it (notably to policemen). On the other hand, *Sie* in the ‘wrong’ situation sounds stand-offish or pompous.

Outside school or university, when talking to fellow pupils or fellow students (where the use of *du* is universal), non-native speakers are advised to let native speakers take the initiative in proposing the use of *du*. It is very important for English speakers to be aware that the use of *du* (and first names) is still much less frequent or acceptable between adults than is the use of first names in the English-speaking countries, especially between colleagues at work and casual acquaintances. It has a quite different social meaning to the use of first names in English and can be interpreted as indicating a lack of respect rather than friendliness, especially from younger to older people.

3.3.1 The uses of *du*, *ihr* and *Sie*

(a) *du* is used

- (i) when speaking to children (up to about the age of 14 – in schools to the 10th class), to animals and inanimate objects, to oneself and to God.
- (ii) between relatives and close friends, between schoolchildren and students, predominantly between blue-collar workmates, between non-commissioned soldiers and between members of clubs, interest groups and

(especially left-wing) political parties.

Unlike some other languages with similar distinctions in the use of second person pronouns, **the use of *du* or *Sie* is always reciprocal**, i.e. there are no longer any circumstances in which one adult would normally use *du* to another and the other would use *Sie* back to them. And using *du* to another adult one has just met is normally considered quite rude.

(b) *ihr* is the plural of *du*

i.e. it is used to address two or more people whom the speaker would individually address with *du*.

However, as *ihr* is unambiguously plural, whereas *Sie* can be singular or plural, it is sometimes used to address a group, even if one would not use *du* with every single one of them, e.g. (at work):

Ich wollte **euch** doch alle zum Kaffee einladen

Occasionally, *ihr* may be used to address any group to stress plurality, even if the speaker would normally address all of them individually as *Sie*. In this way, *ihr* can sometimes function as a kind of neutral compromise to mask the speaker's uncertainty about whether to use *du* or *Sie*.

(c) *Sie* is used in all other cases

It is used especially to adult strangers and generally in middle-class professions (e.g. to colleagues in an office, a shop, or a bank).

Usually, the use of *du* is linked to that of first names, that of *Sie* to formal titles (*Herr Engel*, *Frau Kallmeyer*, etc.). However, the use of *Sie* and first names (so-called 'Hamburger Siezen' or 'Hanseatisches Siezen') is not uncommon, especially from adults to older teenagers and in 'trendy' circles. In the latter case this may possibly be in imitation of the American use of first names, although there is also

a tendency to use *du* on television chatshows and the like to give an impression of familiarity which is at variance with usage outside such artificial situations.

(d) *du* and *ihr* may be spelled with initial capitals in letter-writing

This applies to all the various forms of these pronouns, e.g. *Du* and *Ihr* as well as *Dich*, *Dein*, *Euch*, etc., e.g. *Ich danke Dir recht herzlich für Deinen Brief*. This is optional, and the forms may also be spelled with a small initial letter, e.g. *Ich danke dir recht herzlich für deinen Brief*.

The first spelling reform of 1996 prescribed that capitals should no longer be used with these pronouns. However, this ruling was almost universally ignored and subsequent revisions of the reform have permitted the use of capitals again, as an alternative, see 21.2.3.

3.3.2 Other forms of address

(a) Titles are often used in shops, restaurants, etc. to address customers

Was wünscht **der Herr** ? Was möchten **die Herrschaften** zu Mittag essen?

The use of singular titles of rank with a plural verb (e.g. *Was wünschen gnädige Frau, Herr Major?*) used to be the norm, but it is now archaic or facetious.

(b) The use of *Er* and *Sie* as pronouns of address

In older German the singular pronouns *Er* and *Sie* (spelled with capitals) were used to address people of a lower social standing. This usage persisted into the early twentieth century, but it is now obsolete (except facetiously).

3.4 Third person pronouns

3.4.1 The gender of third person singular pronouns

The third person singular pronouns have distinct forms for each gender, i.e. **masculine** *er*, **feminine** *sie* and **neuter** *es*. Since they take their gender from the noun they refer to, this means that *er*, *sie* or *es* can all correspond to English *it* when referring to things:

Dein Bleistift ? Ach, er lag vorhin auf dem Tisch, aber ich muss ihn jetzt verloren haben	<i>Your pencil? Oh, it was lying on the table a little while ago, but I must have lost it now</i>
Er hörte meine Meinung und stimmte ihr bei	<i>He heard my opinion and agreed with it</i>
Darf ich Ihr Buch noch eine Woche behalten? Ich habe es noch nicht gelesen	<i>May I keep your book another week? I haven't read it yet</i>

Possible conflicts between grammatical and natural gender in the agreement of the pronoun are explained in 1.1.12.

3.4.2 The use of demonstrative rather than third person pronouns

In informal colloquial speech, forms of the demonstrative pronoun *der* (see 5.1.1) are often used rather than a third person personal pronoun:

Der kommt wohl nicht mehr	<i>for</i>	Er kommt wohl nicht mehr
Ich hätt' die kaum wieder erkannt	<i>for</i>	Ich hätte sie kaum wieder erkannt

This is very common in spoken German, but it is only considered acceptable in writing to refer to things. However, it can be used if there is a possible ambiguity or a need for emphasis:

Es gibt Konflikte, wenn zum Beispiel ein Mountainbiker von hinten an Wanderer	<i>There are conflicts, for example if a mountain biker rides up to some</i>
---	--

heranfährt und **die** sich erschrecken
(*Spiegel*)

*hikers from behind and they get a
shock*

diese (see 5.1.2), would be a possible alternative to *die* in a context like this.

3.4.3 Third person pronouns in comparative clauses

Third person pronouns are used in comparative clauses with *wie* (agreeing in gender and number with the relevant noun). This makes it absolutely clear what is being compared:

Das waren Reichtümer, wie **sie** Fürsten
nicht besaßen (*Süßkind*)

*These were riches such as princes
did not possess*

ein Stadtteil, wie **ihn** jede Großstadt kennt
(*Spiegel*)

*a district such as is to be found in
any big city*

Ein Kuchen, wie **ihn** deine Mutter backt, ist
was Besonderes

*A cake like your mother makes is
something special*

3.5 The prepositional adverb

The PREPOSITIONAL ADVERB (sometimes called the PRONOMINAL ADVERB) is formed by prefixing *da(r)* to a preposition, e.g.:

da mit da von dar an dar über

3.5.1 The use of the prepositional adverb instead of a pronoun

The prepositional adverb is often used rather than a preposition followed by a third person pronoun.

The general rule is that the **personal pronoun** is used with a preposition when referring to **people**, whereas the **prepositional adverb** is used when referring to

things. Compare:

Ich spiele **mit ihr** (i.e. mit meiner Schwester)

Ich spiele **damit** (i.e. mit der Puppe)

There are some variations, however, and modern usage is broadly as follows:

(a) The pronoun *es* is not normally used after prepositions

Here the prepositional adverb is the norm:

Da steht mein neues Auto. Ich habe lange
darauf (not *auf es*) warten müssen

*There's my new car. I had to
wait a long time for it*

(b) The personal pronoun is always used after a preposition to refer to individual persons

(but **not** groups of people, see **(d)** below):

Du darfst nicht **mit ihr** spielen
Ich kann mich nicht **an ihn** erinnern

*You mustn't play with her
I can't remember him*

(c) To refer to a specific thing (or things)

In this context, either preposition plus pronoun *or* the prepositional adverb can be used:

Ich habe diese Geschirrspülmaschine seit drei Wochen und bin sehr zufrieden damit/mit ihr	<i>I've had this dishwasher for three weeks and I'm very satisfied with it</i>
---	--

In practice, the prepositional adverb is more frequent. If the combination of preposition plus pronoun is used, it emphasizes the thing referred to more

strongly.

(d) The prepositional adverb is used to refer to abstracts and to groups of people

In particular, *darunter* and *davon* (i.e. ‘among whom’ or ‘of whom’) are very often used to refer to groups of people.

Wie findest du den Vorschlag? Bist
du **damit** einverstanden?

Ich erwarte zehn Gäste, **darunter**
einige sehr alte Bekannte

Die meisten **davon** wollten keinen
Ärger machen

*What do you think of the suggestion? Do
you agree with it?*

*I am expecting ten guests, among them
some very old acquaintances*

Most of them didn't want to cause trouble

(e) The prepositional adverb is always used to refer to whole sentences

Seine Frau hat eine neue Stelle gekriegt.
Darüber freut er sich sehr

*His wife's got a new job. He's very
pleased about it*

(f) If motion is involved, a separable verb prefix with *hin* - or *her* - is used

The prepositional adverb is not used in such contexts (see also 7.2.4):

Wir fanden eine Hütte und gingen
hinein

Sie kam an einen langen Gang und eilte
hindurch

We found a hut and went into it

*She came to a long passage and hurried
through it*

3.5.2 Further notes on the prepositional adverb

(a) The second syllable of the prepositional adverb is usually stressed

da ' durch da ' mit da ' von da ' ran da ' rüber

In spoken German the first syllable may be reduced, e.g. *dran*, *drauf*, *drin*, *drunter*, and these forms are sometimes used in writing.

However, if the prepositional adverb replaces a preposition plus a demonstrative (i.e. = 'with **that**', 'in **that**', etc., see 5.1.1i), then the **first** syllable is stressed, e.g. '*da* durch, '*da* mit, '*da* ran.

' Da mit war alles unter Dach und Fach	<i>With that everything was sorted</i>
--	--

(b) Four common prepositions do not form a prepositional adverb

i.e. *außer*, *gegenüber*, *ohne*, *seit*. These are used with pronouns referring to people *or* things:

Außer ihm ist keiner gekommen
Vor uns ist das Rathaus, und **ihm**
gegenüber liegt der Dom
Ohne es wäre unser Erfolg nicht
möglich gewesen

Nobody came apart from him
In front of us is the town hall and
opposite it is the cathedral
Without it our success wouldn't have
been possible

When referring to things, the pronoun is usually omitted after *gegenüber* and *ohne*, e.g. (*ihm*) **gegenüber** liegt der Dom; **ohne** (*es*) *wäre es nicht möglich gewesen*. *außer* and *seit* are never used with a pronoun to refer to things, and the adverbs *außerdem* 'besides (that)' and *seither* 'since (then)' are used instead.

No prepositional adverbs are formed from the prepositions which govern the genitive. For the use of pronouns with them, see 3.1.2.

(c) In colloquial speech the prepositional adverb is often split

Da weiß ich nichts **von**

Da kann ich nichts **mit** anfangen

This usage is mainly North German, but it has recently become more widespread. If the preposition begins with a vowel, the reduced form of the prepositional adverb is used as the second part rather than the preposition, e.g.:

Da habe ich nicht **dran** gedacht

(d) The prepositional adverb can anticipate a following dependent clause

Ich verlasse mich **darauf**, dass sie rechtzeitig kommt

Details about this construction are given in sections 6.4.1c, 16.5.14 and 17.2.3b.

3.6 The pronoun *es*

The pronoun *es* has a range of uses beyond simply referring back to a neuter noun. In many constructions it functions as a grammatical particle, and this section explains all these.

Note that *es* can never be stressed. If emphasis is needed *es* is replaced by the demonstrative *das* (see 5.1.1h):

Sind **das** Ihre Handschuhe?

Das bist du.

Ich mache **das** schon.

3.6.1 *es* can refer to elements other than neuter nouns

es can refer

(a) to a whole phrase, sentence or situation

Willst du die Brötchen holen? Angela macht es schon	<i>Will you get the rolls? Angela is already doing it</i>
Ich weiß, dass sie gestorben ist, aber Uwe weiß es noch nicht	<i>I know that she is dead, but Uwe doesn' t know (it) yet</i>

(b) to the predicate complement of *sein* or *werden*

to refer back to a noun or adjective after one of these verbs in the preceding clause. Inserting *es* is obligatory in contexts like this, whereas in English either no equivalent or a different construction is required:

Er soll zuverlässig sein, und ich bin sicher, dass er es ist	<i>He is said to be reliable and I am sure he is</i>
Ist Jürgen ein guter Schwimmer? Ja, er ist es	<i>Is Jürgen a good swimmer? Yes, he is (one)</i>
Sein Vater ist Arzt, und er wird es auch	<i>His father is a doctor and he's going to be one, too</i>

3.6.2 Special uses of *es*

(a) *es* is used as the impersonal subject of the verb in many constructions

(i) *es* is used as the subject of all kinds of impersonal verbs or verbs used in impersonal constructions:

es regnet **es** klingelt **es** fehlt mir an Geld **es** bedarf noch einiger Mühe

More details on the use of *es* as an impersonal subject are given in 16.2.4.

(ii) *es* can be used as an indefinite subject, to give the idea of a vague, impersonal agent:

Erst wurde es dunkel, dann gewitterte es	<i>First it got dark, then there was thunder and lightning</i>
Ihn trieb es in die schottischen Hochlande (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>He felt a desire to go to the Highlands of Scotland</i>

(iii) *es* is used in impersonal reflexive constructions, which often have the force of a passive, see 13.4.3b:

Es schreibt sich so leicht mit diesem Filzstift	<i>It's so easy to write with this felt-tip pen</i>
Abends lernt es sich am besten	<i>It is best to study in the evenings</i>

(iv) *es* is used in impersonal passive constructions and in passive constructions with intransitive verbs (see 13.1.3a and 13.1.4):

Es wurde in dieser Zeit viel gearbeitet	<i>A lot of work was done at this time</i>
Es wurde im Nebenzimmer geredet	<i>There was talking in the next room</i>
Es kann ihm doch nicht geholfen werden	<i>He can't be helped, though</i>

In these constructions *es* is always omitted if it is not in first position in a main clause, e.g. *In dieser Zeit wurde viel gearbeitet. Wir wissen doch, dass in dieser Zeit viel gearbeitet wurde*

(b) *es* can be used as an indeterminate subject with *sein* and *werden*

(i) This corresponds to the English use of *it*:

Es ist der Briefträger, ein Polizist	<i>It's the postman, a policeman</i>
Es wurde spät	<i>It got late</i>
Es ist Mittag	<i>It's midday</i>
Es ist Sonntag heute	<i>It's Sunday today</i>

es can be omitted with a time phrase if it is not in initial position, e.g. *Jetzt ist (es) Mittag. Er weiß, dass (es) heute Sonntag ist.*

(ii) *es* can be used with a plural verb and then corresponds to English ‘they’, see 10.1.4b:

Es sind Ausländer	<i>They’re foreigners</i>
Sind es Ihre Handschuhe?	<i>Are they your gloves?</i>
Was sind es ?	<i>What are they?</i>

(iii) In this function, *es* can refer back to a masculine, feminine or plural noun, as an alternative to the expected masculine, feminine or plural pronoun:

Seine Mutter lebt noch. Es/Sie ist eine	<i>His mother is still alive. She’s an old</i>
alte Frau	<i>woman</i>
Siehst du die Kinder dort? Es/Sie sind	<i>Can you see the children there?</i>
meine	<i>They’re mine</i>

(c) *es* with *sein* and a personal pronoun

i.e. corresponding to English ‘It’s me’, ‘It’s them’, etc.

(i) The German construction is different to the English one, in that the person involved is the subject of *sein*, and *es* follows as the predicate:

Du bist es . Ich bin es	<i>It’s you. It’s me</i>
Seid ihr es gewesen?	<i>Was it you?</i>
Sie werden es wohl sein	<i>It will probably be them</i>

(ii) So-called CLEFT SENTENCE constructions with relative clauses are based on this construction in German. These correspond to English constructions like ‘It was you who rang the bell’:

Er war es , der es mir sagte	<i>It was him who told me</i>
-------------------------------------	-------------------------------

Du warst **es** also, der geklingelt hat *So it was you who rang the bell*

Other cleft sentence constructions, especially those corresponding to the English type ‘It was this morning that I saw her’, are used much less often in German than in English (see 19.2.3a).

(d) *es* can be used as a ‘dummy subject’

i.e. it is placed in initial position, before the verb, so that the ‘real’ subject can come later in the sentence. This construction is particularly frequent if the ‘real’ subject is a noun phrase with an indefinite article or an indefinite quantifier. It gives more emphasis to the ‘real’ subject, see 19.2.2d.

(i) With *sein*, this *es* corresponds to ‘there’ in ‘there is/are’:

Es ist ein Brief für Sie da	<i>There’s a letter for you</i>
Es waren viele Wolken am Himmel	<i>There were a lot of clouds in the sky</i>

This *es* is omitted if it is not in first position in a main clause, e.g. *Viele Wolken waren am Himmel. Ich weiß, dass ein Brief für mich da ist.* In such contexts it is not necessary, since the ‘real’ subject is in its expected place.

For the use of *es ist/sind* and *es gibt* for English ‘there is/are’, see 16.2.5.

(ii) In German, unlike English, *es* can be used in this construction with **any** verb. The verb then agrees with the ‘real’ subject, not with the *es*:

Es saß eine alte Frau am Fenster	<i>There was an old woman sitting at the window</i>
Es hatte sich auch ihr Verhältnis zu den Nachbarn verändert	<i>Their relationship to their neighbours had changed, too</i>
Es liegen zwei Briefe für Sie auf dem Schreibtisch	<i>There are two letters for you lying on the desk</i>

This construction is particularly frequent with verbs of happening:

Es ist gestern ein schwerer Unfall
passiert

*A serious accident happened
yesterday*

In spoken German *da* is often used rather than *es* in these contexts, e.g. ***Da** hat eine alte Frau am Fenster gesessen.*

(e) The ‘anticipatory’ *es* pointing forward to a subject clause

es can be used to anticipate a following subordinate or infinitive clause which is the subject of the verb, e.g.:

Es freut mich, **dass** du dein Examen
bestanden hast

*I am pleased that you passed your
examination*

Es fällt mir ein, **dass** ich ihn schon
gesehen haben muss

It occurs to me that I must already
have seen him

Es war mir nicht möglich, früher **zu**
kommen

It wasn’t possible for me to come
earlier

Es liegt mir fern, Schwierigkeiten **zu**
machen

*The last thing I want is to make
difficulties*

If the clause precedes the verb there is no need for the *es*, e.g. *Dass du dein Examen bestanden hast, freut mich.*

This ‘anticipatory’ *es* is sometimes omitted if it is not in first position in a main clause:

Dann fiel (**es**) auf, **dass** er kein
weißes Hemd trug

*Then it was noticed that he wasn’t wearing
a white shirt*

Ihm steht (**es**) nicht zu, ein Urteil **zu**
fällen

It’s not up to him to pass judgement

There is considerable variation in whether *es* is retained or omitted in these contexts. The following general tendencies reflect current usage:

- (i) The omission of *es* is especially frequent (but not obligatory) with the following verbs:

auffallen	sich ergeben aus	gelten	
aufgehen	sich erweisen	sich herausstellen	vorschweben
dazukommen	feststehen	hervorgehen	sich zeigen
einfallen	folgen aus	hinzukommen	

(ii) With many verbs, especially those expressing feelings and emotions, *es* can be omitted before a following *dass* -clause if the main clause begins with a pronoun:

Ihn interessiert (es) nur, dass ihr Vater viel Geld hat Damit hängt (es) natürlich zusammen, dass er im Gefängnis sitzt	<i>The only thing that interests him is that her father's got a lot of money Of course, that's connected with the fact that he's in prison</i>
---	--

(iii) *es* can be omitted with the verb *sein* if the main clause begins with the noun or adjective which is the predicate complement of *sein*:

Wichtig ist (es), dass er es weiß	<i>It's important for him to know it</i>
Wichtig ist (es), diesen Satz richtig zu verstehen	<i>It is important to understand this sentence correctly</i>
Ein Glück ist (es), dass du kommst	<i>It's fortunate you're coming</i>

With *klar*, *leicht*, *möglich*, *schwer* and *wichtig*, *es* can be omitted in these constructions if the main clause begins with a pronoun:

Ihm war (es) völlig klar, dass er jetzt springen musste	<i>It was quite clear to him that he had to jump now</i>
--	--

(iv) *es* is never omitted before *wenn* -clauses: *Mir ist es recht, wenn sie jetzt kommt.*

(f) The 'anticipatory' *es* pointing forward to an object clause

es is often used to anticipate a following infinitive or *dass* -clause which is the object of the verb:

Ich konnte es kaum ertragen, ihn so leiden zu sehen	<i>I could hardly bear to see him suffer like that</i>
Ich habe es erlebt, dass Anne die beste Arbeit geschrieben hat	<i>I have known Anne to write the best piece of work</i>

(i) The use of this ‘anticipatory’ *es* is variable, and there are no hard and fast rules as to when it is used and when not.

However, it is especially frequent with the following verbs, so that the advice to the foreign learner is to always use it with them:

ablehnen	erleben	leiden	
angewöhnen	ermöglichen	leisten	verantworten
aufgeben	ertragen	leugnen	verdienen
aushalten	fertig bringen	lieben	vergessen
bedauern	genießen	merken	vermeiden
begrüßen	gönnen	mögen	versäumen
bemerkn	halten für	schaffen	vertragen
bereuen	hassen	schätzen	verzeihen
betrachten als	hindern	übel nehmen	wagen
dulden	hinnehmen	überlassen	zulassen
erfahren	lassen	unterlassen	

The phrases *nicht erwarten können* and *nicht wahrhaben wollen* are also normally used with an anticipatory *es*, as is *finden* followed by an adjective, e.g. *Ich finde es schön, dass du da bist*.

(ii) Verbs of saying, thinking and knowing, e.g. *ahnen*, *denken*, *erzähle n*, *fühle n*, *glauben*, *höre n*, *sagen*, *wissen* are also often used with an anticipatory *es* in conjunction with certain adverbs and particles, in particular *bereits*, *deutlich*, *doch*, *genug*, *ja*, *oft* and *schon*, or when there is an appeal to the listener’s prior knowledge, e.g.:

Ich habe (es) ihm deutlich gesagt, dass er schreiben muss	<i>I told him clearly enough that he’s got to write</i>
Ich ahnte (es) schon, dass sie schwanger	<i>I already suspected she was</i>

ist	<i>pregnant</i>
Ich weiß (es) ja selber, dass die Ampel rot war	<i>I know myself that the lights were red</i>

(g) *es* corresponds to English 'so' as the object of a few verbs

In particular *sagen* 'say' and *tun* 'do':

Er hat es gesagt	<i>He said so</i>
Warum hast du es getan?	<i>Why did you do so?</i>

es can also be used with *glauben* and *hoffen*, but it is not obligatory:

Kommt sie? – Ich glaube/hoffe (es)	<i>Is she coming? – I think/hope so</i>
------------------------------------	---

(h) *es* is used as an object in a number of idiomatic verbal phrases

In these cases *es* is an essential part of the idiom. The following are the most frequent:

es auf etwas absehen	<i>to be after sth.</i>
es auf etwas ankommen lassen	<i>to take a chance on sth.</i>
es jdm. antun	<i>to appeal to sb.</i>
sie hat es ihm angetan	<i>he fancies her</i>
es mit jdm./etwas aufnehmen können	<i>to be a match for sb./sth.</i>
es bei etwas belassen	<i>to leave it at sth.</i>
es weit bringen	<i>to go far</i>
es zu etwas bringen	<i>to attain sth. (esp. a position)</i>
er hat es zum Professor gebracht	<i>he got to be a professor</i>
es an etwas fehlen lassen	<i>to be lacking in sth.</i>
es eilig haben	<i>to be in a hurry</i>
es gut/schlecht haben	<i>to be (un)fortunate</i>
es in sich haben	<i>to be a tough nut to crack</i>
es sich leicht/schwer machen	<i>to make it easy/difficult for oneself</i>

es gut mit jdm. meinen	to mean well with sb.
es mit etwas genau nehmen	to be punctilious with sth.
es mit jdm. zu tun haben	to have to deal with sb.
es sich mit jdm. verdröben haben	to have fallen out with sb.
es mit etwas versuchen	to try (one's hand at) sth.

(i) *es* used with adjectives in conjunction with *sein* or *werden*

When some adjectives are used as the predicate complement of *sein* or *werden*, they are preceded by *es*, e.g. *Ich bin es satt* 'I am sick of it'. This *es* is used especially with those adjectives which govern the genitive of nouns (see 6.3.3), e.g. *Ich bin es nun überdrüssig*.

The following adjectives occur in this construction:

los müde satt teilhaftig überdrüssig wert würdig zufrieden

Also:

Ich bin es gewohnt	<i>I am used to it</i>
Ich wurde es gewahr (lit.)	<i>I became aware of it</i>

When *gewohnt sein* and *wert sein* are used with a following *dass*-clause, the *es* can be used to anticipate the subordinate clause, e.g. *Ich bin (es) nicht mehr gewohnt, am frühen Morgen aufzustehen*. This usage is common, but not obligatory.

4

The articles

German, like English, has a DEFINITE and an INDEFINITE ARTICLE.

The ARTICLES belong to a closed set of small words known as DETERMINERS. They are used with NOUNS to link them to a particular context or situation. Besides the articles, the determiners include all those words, like the DEMONSTRATIVES (*dieser, jener*, etc.), the POSSESSIVE S (*mein, sein*, etc.) and INDEFINITES (*einige, etliche*, etc.), which are used to specify nouns. They typically have **first position** in a NOUN PHRASE, before any adjectives, as shown in [Table 4.1](#).

[Table 4.1](#) The noun phrase: determiners (articles)

Determiner	Adjective	Noun
der	runde	Tisch
ein	schnelles	Auto
eine	außerordentlich langweilige	Zeitung
das	in der bayrischen Hauptstadt gebraute	Bier

The form and use of the articles are explained in this chapter; the other determiners are dealt with in [Chapter 5](#).

The definite and indefinite articles DECLINE, i.e. they have endings which indicate the grammatical categories of the nouns they are used with: CASE, NUMBER and GENDER. In practice **the forms of the article are the main way these categories of the noun are shown** in German, and mastering them is essential to be able to use and understand German. [Tables 4.2](#) and [4.3](#) show the declension of the definite article *der* – *die* – *das* and the indefinite article *ein* – *eine*.

[Table 4.2](#) Declension of the definite article

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	der	die	das	die
Accusative	den	die	das	die
Genitive	des	der	des	der
Dative	dem	der	dem	den

[Table 4.3](#) Declension of the indefinite article

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	ein	eine	ein
Accusative	einen	eine	ein
Genitive	eines	einer	eines
Dative	einem	einer	einem

In most instances (85%) German and English agree on whether the definite, indefinite or no ('zero') article is used with a noun in a particular context. However, as the articles are very frequent, the contexts where the two languages do not correspond are significant, in particular where German uses a definite article when English has none. This chapter deals with the **forms** and **uses** of the **articles** as follows:

- The **declension** of the definite and indefinite articles (section 4.1)
- The use of the articles with **abstract** and other similar **nouns** (section 4.2)
- The use of the articles in **generalizations** (section 4.3)
- The use of the articles with **names** (section 4.4)
- The use of the articles in **time expressions** (section 4.5)
- The use of the definite article to indicate **possession** (section 4.6)
- Other contexts where **German and English differ** in the use of the articles (section 4.7)
- The '**zero article**' – the noun used **with no article** (section 4.8)
- The use of the articles with **phrasal verbs** (section 4.9)
- The use of the articles with **prepositions** (section 4.10)

4.1 The declension of the articles

4.1.1 The definite article

The declension of the definite article **der/die/das** is given in [Table 4.2](#), and this section provides further information on these forms.

(a) In spoken German the definite article is lightly stressed

This means that reduced forms are the norm, e.g.:

<i>der</i> [dɐ]	<i>die</i> [di]	<i>das</i> [d(ə)s] or [s]
<i>den</i> [d(ə)n] or [n]	<i>dem</i> [d(ə)m] or [m]	<i>des</i> [d(ə)s]

These reductions rarely occur in writing, except to reflect speech in written dialogue, but they are the norm in unaffected speech, since the full forms, e.g. [de: m], have the force of a demonstrative, i.e. ‘this’ or ‘that’, see 5.1.1. Compare:

Ich habe’ n Tisch gekauft	<i>I bought the table</i>
Ich habe den [de:n] Tisch gekauft	<i>I bought that table</i>

(b) The definite article cannot be omitted in pairs of words if a different gender or number is involved

In English we can say ‘the house and garden(s)’ or ‘the son and daughter(s)’, with the definite article being understood to refer to the second noun as well. This is only possible in German if the two nouns have the same gender or number. In other contexts the second article with its different form **must** be included:

das Haus und der Garten/ die Gärten	der Sohn und die Tochter/ die Töchter
--	--

On the other hand, **die** *Söhne und Töchter* is correct, since both nouns are plural

and would have the same article. However, the article can only be omitted if the nouns are linked in some way. We can only say *der Bürgermeister und Vorsitzende des Vereins*, for example, if both nouns refer to the same person. If two different people are being referred to, the article is repeated: *der Bürgermeister und der Vorsitzende des Vereins*. This is the same in English, since we would also have to say *The mayor and the chairman of the club* if they are not the same person.

This rule applies to all the other determiners, and to adjectives used with nouns, e.g. *sein Sohn und seine Töchter* but *seine Söhne und Töchter*, *guter Wein und gutes Bier* but *alte Männer und Frauen*, see 6.1.3f.

(c) Contracted forms of the definite article are used with some prepositions

We can distinguish:

(i) Contractions which are usual in both speech and writing:

ans = an + das	am = an + dem	beim = bei + dem	ins = in + das
im = in + dem	vom = von + dem	zum = zu + dem	zur = zu + der

In these cases the uncontracted forms are only used if the article is relatively stressed. This often depends on style and sentence rhythm, although many Germans consider the uncontracted forms to be ‘better style’ in formal writing. Uncontracted forms are also particularly frequent to refer back to something recently mentioned in order to make it clear that it is the one meant. Note the difference between:

Er ging **zu der** Hütte (the one we were just talking about)

Er ging **zur** Hütte (the one we all know about)

Where the force of **der** is demonstrative (= ‘that’, see 5.1.1), only the uncontracted form is possible:

Einer der Affen war besonders lebhaft.	<i>One of the monkeys was particularly</i>
Klaus wollte unbedingt eine Aufnahme von dem Affen machen	<i>active. Klaus really wanted to take a picture of that monkey</i>

Similarly, where the noun is particularized, e.g. by a following relative clause, the uncontracted form is usual:

an dem Nachmittag, an dem sie anrief	<i>on the afternoon when she called</i>
Er geht zu der Schule, wo sein Vater früher war	<i>He goes to the school where his father used to be</i>

On the other hand, only the contracted forms are used in set phrases and expressions, e.g.:

am Dienstag	am 10. Mai	am einfachsten
im Frühling	im Freien	im Gang
zum Frühstück	zur Zeit	im Vertrauen
Ich nahm ihn beim Wort	Sie war beim Kochen	

Compare:

Am Dienstag kam er spät zur Arbeit	<i>On Tuesday he came to work late</i>
An dem Dienstag kam er spät zur Arbeit	<i>That Tuesday he came to work late</i>

(ii) Contractions which are common in speech and sometimes used in writing. These are:

aufs = auf + das	durchs = durch + das	fürs = für + das
übers = über + das	ums = um + das	unters = unter + das

These are usually written as two words, although there are some set phrases where the contracted forms are always used, e.g.:

aufs Land fahren	übers Herz bringen
fürs Leben gern	ums Leben kommen

(iii) Contractions which are frequent in spoken German, but only very occasionally used in writing, usually in set phrases or in imitation of casual speech. These are:

außerm	hinterm	hintern	hinters	überm
übern	unterm	untern	vorm	vors

(iv) Other contractions are regular in everyday colloquial speech but not normally used in writing, e.g.:

an'n bei'n durch'n in'n mit'm nach'm seit'm

4.1.2 The forms of the indefinite article

The declension of the indefinite article *ein* is given in [Table 4.3](#), and this section provides further information on these forms.

(a) The indefinite article has no plural

Indefinite plural nouns are used without an article, as in English:

Hier gibt es gute Weine	<i>There are good wines here</i>
-------------------------	----------------------------------

(b) In spoken German the definite article is lightly stressed

This means that reduced forms are the norm, e.g.:

<i>ein</i> [n]	<i>eine</i> [nə]	<i>einen</i> [nən]
<i>einem</i> [nəm]	<i>einer</i> [nə]	<i>eines</i> [nəs]

These reductions are rare in writing except in imitation of casual dialogue, but they are the norm in unaffected speech, where the full forms, e.g. [aɪn], [aɪn ə n], etc., would be interpreted as the numeral *ein* 'one'. Compare:

Ich habe 'n Buch gekauft
Ich habe **ein** [ain] Buch gekauft

I bought a book
*I bought **one** book*

(c) The indefinite article *ein* has a negative form *kein*

It is used typically where a corresponding positive sentence would have an indefinite article or no article, and it is thus most often the equivalent of English *not ... a*, *not ... any* or *no*. Further details on its use are given in 5.5.16:

Es war ein angenehmer Anblick
Kennst du einen Arzt?
Hier gibt es gute Weine
Ich habe Geld

Es war **kein** angenehmer Anblick
Kennst du **keinen** Arzt?
Hier gibt es **keine** guten Weine
Ich habe **kein** Geld

Unlike *ein*, *kein* has a plural form, and its full declension is given in [Table 4.4](#).

[Table 4.4](#) Declension of the negative indefinite article *kein*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	kein	keine	kein	keine
Accusative	keinen	keine	kein	keine
Genitive	keines	keiner	keines	keiner
Dative	keinem	keiner	keinem	keinen

[4.2 The definite article with abstract and similar nouns](#)

This section deals with abstract nouns and other similar groups of nouns which are characteristically used with a definite article in German, but no article in English.

[4.2.1 Abstract nouns](#)

(a) German typically uses a definite article with abstract nouns

This is particularly the case where the reference is to a specific and definite whole, known and familiar to the speaker and listener. An article is normally lacking in contexts like this in English.

Er fürchtet das Alter	<i>He is afraid of old age</i>
Er liebte die Demokratie	He loved democracy
Wir hängen von der Industrie ab	We depend on industry
Die Zeit vergeht	Time passes
Das Volk lebt im Elend (<i>Spiegel</i>)	The people are living in misery
Die Menschheit braucht nichts nötiger als den Frieden	<i>Humanity needs nothing more urgently than peace</i>

(b) In some contexts no article is used with abstract nouns

In contrast to the more typical cases exemplified in (a) above, there are some contexts where German has no article with abstract nouns, in particular where the idea is not referred to as a whole, but in a vaguely general, indefinite and partial sense, which comes as a new idea in the context. It is typical of these contexts that *some* or *any* can often be inserted in the corresponding English sentence without changing its essential meaning:

Zu dieser Aufgabe gehört Mut	<i>This task demands (some) courage</i>
Seine Parteiliebe witterten Verrat	His party colleagues suspected (some)
Unentschlossenheit wäre jetzt	treachery
verhängnisvoll	(Any) indecision now would be
Bewegung ist gesund	disastrous
	<i>(Any) exercise is healthy</i>

Compare the following sentences:

Unter seinen Anhängern entstand Misstrauen	<i>(Some) distrust arose among his followers</i>
Das Misstrauen wächst unter seinen	<i>Distrust is growing among his</i>

Anhängern

followers

In the first sentence ‘distrust’ is a new concept of a rather vague, general and indefinite kind. In the second it is a specific and familiar notion. In practice, however, the distinction is sometimes quite slight, and there are contexts where either the definite article or no article is possible, e.g.:

Sie kämpfen für **(die)** Gerechtigkeit

They are fighting for justice

In practice such a partial or indefinite sense is often present when an abstract noun, particularly one denoting a human quality or emotion, is used with an adjective. In such contexts no article is used in German:

Ich verachte **kleinliche Eifersucht**

I despise (any) petty jealousy

Im Heer wuchs **neuer Mut**

In the army new courage was growing

Er neigt zu **unnötiger Verschwendung**

He tends to unnecessary extravagance

Abstract nouns in general statements can be used with the definite article or with no article, e.g.:

(Der) Frieden ist das höchste Gut der Menschen

Peace is man's greatest good

(c) No article is used with abstract nouns in proverbs, sayings and set phrases

There is often no article with abstract nouns in these, e.g.:

Alter schützt vor **Torheit** nicht

There's no fool like an old fool

Not kennt kein Gebot

Necessity knows no law

Stolz ist keine Tugend

Pride is not a virtue

(d) No article is used with abstract nouns in a few other contexts

- in pairs of words and enumerations, see 4.8.1.

- in some constructions with the verbs *sein* and *werden*, see 4.8.2.
- with some phrasal verbs, see 4.9.

4.2.2 Other nouns typically used with a definite article

The use of the article with a few other groups of nouns is similar to that with abstract nouns, and differs from English.

(a) Names of substances

These have a definite article if they are understood as general concepts, but no article if they are used in an indefinite or partial sense:

Die Butter kostete 3 Euro das Pfund	<i>Butter cost 3 euros a pound</i>
Faraday hat die Elektrizität erforscht	Faraday investigated electricity
Die Bauern bauen hier Roggen an	The farmers grow rye here
Wir importieren Kaffee aus Afrika	<i>We import coffee from Africa</i>

In generalizations, either the definite article or no article can be used:

(Das) Eisen ist ein Metall	<i>Iron is a metal</i>
(Die) Elektrizität ist eine wichtige Energiequelle	<i>Electricity is an important source of energy</i>

The definite article occurs in some set phrases, e.g. *beim Bier sitzen*; *Das steht nur auf dem Papier*.

(b) Names of meals

The definite article is used with meals if they are referred to as known quantities, but the article is optional if the reference is indefinite or partial:

Das Mittagessen wird um 13 Uhr eingenommen	<i>Lunch is taken at 1 p.m.</i>
---	---------------------------------

Wir sollen uns vor **dem Frühstück** treffen
Ich habe **(das) Mittagessen** bestellt
Wann bekommen wir **(das) Frühstück** ?

We are to meet before breakfast
I have ordered lunch
When are we getting breakfast?

(c) Names of sicknesses and diseases

These have a definite article when they are referred to in general as known quantities, but there is no article when they are referred to in an indefinite or partial sense, or as a new idea in the context, particularly after *haben*:

Er ist an **der Schwindsucht** gestorben
Sie ist an **den Masern** erkrankt
Die Grippe hat Tausende weggerafft
Ich habe **Kopfschmerzen, Gelbsucht**

He died of consumption
She fell ill with measles
Influenza carried off thousands
I've got a headache, jaundice

Singular names of specific illnesses are used with the indefinite article to refer to a bout of that disease. This is in particular the case when the noun is modified by an adjective:

Er ist an **einer Lungenentzündung** gestorben
Er hat **einen Schnupfen, eine Erkältung**

He died of (a bout of) pneumonia
He's got a cold

(d) Names of languages

These nouns from adjectives have two forms, see also 6.2.4d:

(i) an inflected one, always used with the definite article, which refers to the language in a general sense:

Das Spanische ist **dem Portugiesischen**
sehr nahe verwandt
eine Übersetzung aus **dem Russischen** ins
Deutsche

*Spanish is very closely related
to Portuguese*
*a translation from Russian into
German*

(ii) an uninflected form, which refers to the language in a specific context. With this, article use is the same as in English:

das Deutsch der Auswanderer	<i>the German of the emigrants</i>
Luthers Deutsch	Luther's German
Sie kann, versteht, lernt Deutsch	She knows, understands, is learning
Sie kann kein Deutsch	German
eine Zusammenfassung in Deutsch	She doesn't know any German
	<i>a summary in German</i>

(iii) The distinction in usage between these two forms is not always clear-cut, particularly with compound forms or when the noun is qualified by an adjective. In the nominative the uninflected forms tend to be preferred, e.g. *das Schweizerdeutsch*, *das österreichische Deutsch*, as also in the dative with an adjective, e.g. *im heutigen Deutsch*, and in this case the definite article is also present. But with compounds with no adjective after *im* there is a clear preference for using the inflected form, e.g. *im Hochdeutschen*.

(e) Names of historical periods, literary and philosophical movements, religions

The definite article is normally used with these:

der deutsche Expressionismus	<i>German Expressionism</i>
Diese Auffassung ist charakteristisch für den Islam	This view is characteristic of Islam
Marx begreift den Feudalismus als notwendige Stufe der historischen Entwicklung (<i>Knaur</i>)	<i>Marx considers feudalism to be a necessary stage in the process of history</i>

(f) Names of the arts and sciences

The definite article is normally used with these:

Ich erwarte von **der Literatur** mehr
Anregung als **vom Leben** (Grass)
Darüber schweigt **die Geschichte**
ein Lehrbuch **der Astronomie**
Sie liebt **die Musik**

*I expect more stimulus from
literature than from life
History is silent about that
a textbook of astronomy
She loves music*

No article is used to refer to school or university subjects, e.g. *Sie hat eine Zwei in **Geschichte** aber eine Vier in **Mathe**. Else studiert **Astronomie** in Göttingen.*

(g) Names of institutions, company titles and buildings

The definite article is normally always used with these:

Sie geht in **die Schule**
Er wurde **ins Parlament** gewählt
Die Bundesrepublik gehört **der NATO**
an
Er arbeitet bei **der BASF**
im Kölner Dom, **das Ulmer Rathaus**

*She goes to school
He was elected to parliament
The Federal Republic belongs to
NATO
He works for BASF
in Cologne cathedral, Ulm town hall*

No article is used with names of buildings with a proper name in apposition, e.g. *Schloss Sanssouci, Burg Gibichstein, Kloster Beuron.*

(h) Infinitives used as nouns

The definite article is used with these when they are used in a general sense:

Er hat **das Schwimmen** verlernt
Das Kaffeetrinken kam im 17.
Jahrhundert nach Europa

*He has forgotten how to swim
Coffee-drinking came to Europe in the
17th century*

4.3 The use of articles in generalizations

Generalizations about people and things can be expressed in different ways.
Compare the following possibilities in German and English:

- (a) Die Tanne ist ein Nadelbaum
- (b) Die Tannen sind Nadelbäume
- (c) Eine Tanne ist ein Nadelbaum
- (d) Tannen sind Nadelbäume

The fir is a conifer
[no direct English equivalent]
A fir is a conifer
Firs are conifers

German tends to use constructions like (a) above, especially in writing, whereas English has a clear preference for sentences like (d). The following example illustrates a characteristic equivalence:

Das Auto ist der Fluch der modernen Stadt
(Zeit)

*Cars are the curse of modern
cities*

Construction (b), with a definite article and a plural noun, is quite common in German, but it is only used in English with a limited number of nouns (especially nouns of nationality). Compare:

Die Beschwerden vermehren sich
Die Steuern waren drückend (*Brecht*)
Die Italiener lieben die Musik

Complaints are increasing
Taxes were oppressive
The Italians love music

English ‘man’ in the sense ‘human being’ is not normally used with an article, while *der Mensch*, with a definite article, is regular in German in general statements of type (a) above, e.g.:

Der Mensch ist ein seltsames Geschöpf

Man is a strange animal

4.4 Articles with geographical and other proper names

4.4.1 Geographical and astronomical names

(a) Masculine names of countries

(See 1.1.6h). With these, the definite article is usual, but optional:

(der) Libanon	(der) Iran	in/im Sudan
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With masculine names of regions or provinces the use of the definite article is the norm, e.g. *der Balkan*, *der Bosphorus*.

(b) Feminine and plural names of countries and regions

These are **always** used with a definite article:

die Schweiz die Lausitz die USA	die Türkei die Normandie die Niederlande	die Ukraine die Steiermark
--	---	---

(c) Neuter names of countries and cities

No article is used with most of these:

Deutschland Norwegen Spanien Leipzig London Ulm

However, some neuter names of regions and provinces are normally used with the article:

das Elsass das Rheinland	das Engadin das Vogtland (and all others in <i>-land</i>)	das Ries	das Wallis <i>Valais</i>
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Historical German regions are sometimes referred to with an adjectival noun, e.g. *Jetzt kommen wir **ins** Bayrische*; *Das Dorf liegt **im** Thüringischen*. The definite article is always used with these.

The definite article is optional with *Tirol*: ***in/im*** *Tirol*.

(d) Other geographical and astronomical names always have a definite article

This is so even where English has no article:

der Mont Blanc
der Mars

der Genfer See
die Venus

der Bodensee *Lake Constance*
der Jupiter

(e) The definite article is commonly used to refer to street names

Ich wohne in **der** Goethestraße

Wir treffen uns auf **dem** Schlossplatz

Der Alexanderweg ist die zweite Querstraße **zur** Humboldtstraße

However, no article is used in addresses: *Frau Gerlinde Haarmann, Weserstraße 247, 34125 Kassel*.

4.4.2 Use of the article with personal names

In standard German there is usually no article with personal names. However, there are some exceptions to this rule:

(a) In colloquial speech a definite article is frequent with names

Ich sehe **die** Monika

Gestern war ich bei **der** Frau Schmidt

This usage is characteristic of South German speech, where the use of the article is universal, but it has spread into North Germany in recent years.

(b) The article is always used with names placed outside the sentence

in so-called 'dislocation' to the right or left:

Den Robert Bauer, den kann sie einfach nicht riechen.

Hat er irgendwas gewusst davon, der Peter?

Ich habe sie seit langem nicht mehr gesehen, die Angelika

(c) To clarify case or gender

(see also 4.7a):

der Vortrag des Klaus Müller Das hat Klaus dem Wolfgang Pedersen gesagt

Ich habe eben mit der Rupp (i.e. Frau Rupp, *not* Herr Rupp) gesprochen

(d) To individualize the person concerned more strongly

Der Lehmann hat einen ausgezeichneten Vortrag gehalten

die Briefe Leopold Mozarts an das Nannerl (*Hildesheimer*)

(e) to refer to characters in plays

Er hat in der vorigen Saison den Hamlet gespielt

4.4.3 Geographical and proper names qualified by an adjective

A definite article is always used when names have an adjective with them.

das heutige Deutschland	das viktorianische England	das zerstörte Dresden
das kalte Moskau	der junge Heinrich	der alte Doktor Schulze

This applies also to saints' names: *der heilige Franziskus* 'Saint Francis'.

4.5 The use of articles in time expressions

(a) The names of months and seasons are used with a definite article

Der April war verregnet Wir fahren **im August** nach Italien

Der Frühling war dieses Jahr spät **Im Winter** friert der Bach zu

The names of the months have no article after prepositions other than *an*, *bis zu* and *in* (see below), or after *Anfang*, *Mitte*, *Ende*:

Es war kalt für April Der Fahrplan gilt von Mai bis Oktober

Ende Februar hat es geschneit Er kommt erst Anfang Mai

No article is used with these words after *sein* and *werden*, see 4.8.2c, e.g. *Es ist, wird Sommer*, or when the name is qualified by *letzten*, *nächsten*, *vorigen*, *vergangenen*, e.g.:

nächsten Oktober letzten Herbst

(b) The major festivals are not used with an article

Weihnachten Silvester Neujahr Pfingsten Ostern

Note though: *der Heilige Abend* 'Christmas Eve', *der Karfreitag* 'Good Friday'

(c) All time nouns are used with the definite article after the prepositions *an*, *bis zu* and *in*

am Mittwoch

am 27. Januar

am Tag <i>by day</i>	in der Nacht <i>at night</i>	bis zum Montag
in der Gegenwart <i>at present</i>	im Jahre 1945	in der vorigen Woche

After other prepositions in time expressions there is normally no article. Consult the entries for the individual prepositions in [Chapter 18](#).

4.6 Definite article or possessive?

In a number of contexts German uses a definite article rather than a possessive determiner (e.g. *mein, sein, unser*).

4.6.1 Referring to parts of the body and articles of clothing

(a) German most often uses a definite article with these nouns

This is quite different to English, which always uses a possessive determiner:

Hast du die Zähne geputzt?	<i>Have you cleaned your teeth?</i>
Sie hat das Bein gebrochen	She has broken her leg
Sie strich den Rock glatt	She smoothed her skirt
Das Mädchen zog den rötlichen Kamm aus dem Haar, nahm ihn in den Mund und fing an, mit den Fingern die Frisur zurechtzuzupfen (<i>Böll</i>)	<i>The girl took the reddish comb out of her hair, put it in her mouth and began to put her hair straight with her fingers</i>

A possessive dative is often used in such constructions, and it is essential when the relevant person is not the subject of the verb, see 2.5.3, e.g.:

Sie nahm es (sich) in den Mund	<i>She put it in her mouth</i>
Die Mütze fiel mir vom Kopf	My cap fell off my head
Wir zogen dem Verletzten die Hose aus	<i>We took the injured man's trousers off</i>

(b) A possessive determiner is used rather than the definite article in a few contexts

(i) when the owner has been named in a previous sentence, or when the part of the body or article of clothing is the first element in the sentence:

Ein Fremder erschien. Seine Stirn glänzte. Sein Anzug war altmodisch Meine Beine sind nicht krumm (Brecht)	<i>A stranger appeared. His forehead glistened. His suit was old-fashioned My legs aren't crooked</i>
---	---

(ii) when the owner must be specified, but the verb does not permit the use of a possessive dative:

Ich erblickte eine Wespe auf meinem Ärmel Sie legte ihre Hand auf seine Hand (Wendt)	<i>I caught sight of a wasp on my sleeve She put her hand on his hand</i>
---	---

(iii) to emphasize the owner or avoid ambiguity:

Langsam hob sie ihre rechte Hand Hast du deine Zähne geputzt? Zieh (dir) lieber deinen Mantel an! Ich zog mir seine Hose an	<i>Slowly, she raised her right hand Have you cleaned your teeth? Put your coat on (i.e. not mine!) I put his trousers on</i>
--	---

4.6.2 Other contexts where a possessive is not used in German

(a) The definite article is sometimes used with some abstract nouns

This is particularly frequent with nouns denoting human attributes and emotions, which are thus seen as 'part' of the person concerned. A possessive dative may occur under the same conditions as with body parts:

Du musst versuchen, **die/deine** Angst zu
überwinden

Ich werde ihm **die Faulheit** austreiben

Der Appetit ist mir vergangen

*You must try to overcome your
fear*

I shall rid him of his laziness

I've lost my appetite

(b) The definite or indefinite article can be used with the adjective *eigen*

The appropriate one of these can be an alternative to a possessive determiner:

Er hat **den/seinen** eigenen Sohn
erschlagen

Jetzt haben wir **eine/unsere** eigene
Wohnung

He killed his own son

*We've got our own flat/a flat of our own
now*

Note, as a set phrase with no article: *Das haben wir mit **eigenen Augen** gesehen.*

4.7 Other uses of the definite article

There are a few other contexts where the use of the definite article is unexpected or differs from English.

(a) The definite article is sometimes used to make the case of a noun clear

In the genitive and dative cases in particular a definite article is sometimes used in order primarily to mark the case of a noun.

(i) The definite article used to mark the **genitive** case:

der Geruch **des** Seetangs
ein Ausdruck **des** Erstaunens

*the smell of seaweed
an expression of surprise*

In practice no noun (other than a proper name) can be used in the genitive without a determiner or an adjective which shows the case. In this way, the article is essential in the first of the sentences below to show that the noun is in the genitive case. On the other hand, *brauchen* is a transitive verb with a direct object in the accusative case, and no article is needed:

Sie bedarf der Ruhe	}	<i>She needs rest</i>
Sie braucht Ruhe		

If ambiguity could arise from the use of a definite article, then a phrase with *von* must be used (see 2.4). Thus ‘the smell of wild boar’ has to be given with *der Geruch von Eber* if *der Geruch des Ebers* could be understood in the context to mean ‘the smell of **the** wild boar’ (i.e. a particular one).

(ii) The definite article used to mark the **dative** case. In these examples the definite article would otherwise not be obligatory (see 4.2.2), but it is used to resolve an ambiguity or make the function of the particular noun in the sentence clear:

Ich ziehe Kaffee dem Tee vor	<i>I prefer coffee to tea</i>
Dieses Metall gleicht dem Gold	This metal resembles gold
Er hat sich der Physik gewidmet	<i>He devoted himself to physics</i>

(b) The definite article can be used in a distributive sense

In such contexts English commonly uses the indefinite article or ‘per’:

Die Butter kostete 3 Euro das Pfund	<i>The butter cost 3 euros a/per pound</i>
Sie kommt zweimal die Woche zu uns (or zweimal in der Woche)	<i>She comes to us twice a week</i>
Wir fahren 80 Kilometer die Stunde	<i>We were doing 80 kilometres per hour</i>

pro (see 18.1.7d) and (with measurements) *je*, both without an article, are common alternatives to the definite article in this sense:

Wir zahlten 2 Euro **pro/je** Meter
Es kostet 20 Euro **pro** Stunde

*We paid 2 euros a/per metre
It costs 20 euros an hour*

(c) The definite article is always used with *meist*

Er hat **das** **meiste** Geld
die **meisten** Jungen
die **meisten** meiner Freunde

*He has (the) most money
most of the boys
most of my friends*

4.8 The 'zero article'

In most contexts English and German agree on whether an article is used or not, but there are some contexts in which no article is used in German where one might be expected or where the usual English equivalent construction has a definite or indefinite article.

4.8.1 Nouns used in pairs or enumerations

These often lack the definite article even if a single noun in the same construction would require an article. Many of these are idiomatic or set phrases:

Form und Inhalt	<i>form and content</i>
Tag und Nacht	day and night
mit Müh und Not	with great difficulty
Es geht um Leben und Tod	It's a matter of life and death
in Hülle und Fülle	in plenty
Rhein, Main und Donau sind schiffbare Flüsse	The Rhine, the Main and the Danube are navigable rivers
In Industrie und Handwerk bleiben Tausende von Arbeitsplätzen unbesetzt (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>In industry and trade thousands of job vacancies remain unfilled</i>

4.8.2 No article in the predicate of the verbs *sein*, *werden*, *bleiben*

These are COPULAR VERBS (see 16.6) which have a PREDICATE COMPLEMENT in the nominative case (see 2.1.3). In some contexts these nouns are used without an article, unlike in English.

(a) With nouns denoting professions, nationality, origins or classes of people in general

Er ist Arzt, Bäcker, Installateur	<i>He is a doctor, a baker, a plumber</i>
Ich bin Deutsche(r), Engländer/-in, Schwede/Schwedin	<i>I am a German, an Englishman/-woman, a Swede</i>
Franz ist gläubiger Katholik	<i>Franz is a devout Catholic</i>
Helmut blieb Junggeselle	<i>Helmut remained a bachelor</i>
Danach wurde er Marxist	<i>After that he became a Marxist</i>

But the indefinite article **is** used if the noun refers to a specific individual, not to a class of person:

Sie ist eine bekannte Anwältin	<i>She is a well-known lawyer</i>
Er ist ein richtiger Schauspieler	<i>He's a real actor</i>

The indefinite article is also used in descriptive constructions with professions and positions, e.g.:

Er hatte den Titel eines Professors , die Stelle eines Untersuchungsrichters	<i>He had the title of professor, the position of examining magistrate</i>
--	--

(b) With certain nouns, mainly in formal writing

A number of nouns are typically used with no article in formal writing at the beginning of a sentence with *sein* to introduce a general statement. The most frequent of these nouns are *Bedingung*, *Fakt*, *Gegenstand*, *Grundlage*, *Sache*, *Schwerpunkt*, *Tatsache*, *Voraussetzung* and *Ziel*.

Tatsache ist, dass ...	<i>It is a fact that ...</i>
Bedingung dafür ist, dass er den Vertrag unterschreibt	<i>The condition for this is that he signs the contract</i>
Auch Anfang Januar brauchen Autofahrer wieder Geduld. Grund sind einige Baustellen, Straßensperrungen und Verkehrsänderungen (MM)	<i>At the beginning of January, too, drivers will need to be patient again. This is because of some road works, road closures and diversions</i>

(c) With the names of the months and the seasons, and abstract nouns used in a general sense

Against the usual rule with these (see 4.2 and 4.5) they are used with no article after the verb *sein*:

Es war schon April	<i>It was already April</i>
Jetzt ist Sommer	<i>It's summer now</i>
Heute Abend ist Tanz	<i>There's a dance on tonight</i>
Das ist Geschmackssache	<i>That is a matter of taste</i>

4.8.3 'Zero article' for English *some* or *any*

The most frequent equivalent in German for the English indefinite determiners 'some' or 'any' is simply to use the noun without an article:

Ich möchte Suppe	<i>I should like some soup</i>
Brauchen Sie Marken ?	<i>Do you need any stamps?</i>
Ich habe (rote) Äpfel gekauft	<i>I bought some (red) apples</i>
wenn du noch Schwierigkeiten hast	<i>if you have any more difficulties</i>
Hast du Geld bei dir?	<i>Have you got any money on you?</i>

For further information on German equivalents for *some* and *any*, see 5.5.9b.

4.8.4 Other contexts where no article is used

In particular contexts where English typically has a definite or indefinite article:

(a) No article is used in phrases introduced by *als* ‘as’

Ich kannte ihn als Junge	<i>I knew him when I was a boy</i>
Er sprach als Franzose	He spoke as a Frenchman
die Bedeutung des Passes als wichtige(r)	the significance of the pass as an
Handelstraße	important trade route
Als überzeugter Demokrat kann ich das	As a convinced democrat, I cannot
nicht gutheißen	approve of that
Er gilt als bester Tenor der Neuzeit	<i>He is reckoned to be the best tenor of</i>
	<i>modern times</i>

However, an article can be used with verbs which are usually followed by *als*, e.g. *ansehen, betrachten, fühlen, gelten*: *Er gilt als (der) beste(r) Tenor der Neuzeit.*

The article can also be used in the genitive case, e.g. *mit der Verhaftung des Generals als (des) eigentlichen Putschführers.*

(b) The article can be omitted in appositional phrases

See 2.6 for information about APPPOSITION. The lack of the article is characteristic of formal written registers.

Zunächst kamen wir nach Florenz, (der)	<i>First we arrived in Florence, the</i>
Hauptstadt der Toskana	<i>capital of Tuscany</i>
dieses Zürich, (der) Treffpunkt der	this Zurich, the meeting place of
Kaufleute (Frisch)	businessmen
Neil Armstrong, (der) amerikanischer	<i>Neil Armstrong, the American</i>
Astronaut , betrat als erster Mensch den	<i>astronaut, was the first man to set</i>
Mond (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>foot on the moon</i>

(c) No article is used in some formulaic expressions referring to

people

This usage is typical of formal, especially official registers.

Angeklagter hat gestanden, dass ...
Unterzeichneter bittet um rasche
Entscheidung seiner Angelegenheit
Verfasser behauptet, das Problem
gelöst zu haben

The accused confessed that ...
The undersigned requests a speedy
decision in the matter concerning him
*The author claims to have solved the
problem*

(d) Articles are often omitted for stylistic effect in headlines and advertisements

Verbrechen gestanden. Münchner Kaufmann
vom Geschäftspartner erschlagen (HA)
Wohnung mit Bad gesucht möglichst nahe
Stadtzentrum

*Crime admitted. Munich
businessman killed by partner
Flat with bathroom required as
close as possible to city centre*

(e) No article is used with adverbial genitives

e.g. *schweren Herzens* ‘with a heavy heart’, see 2.3.3d.

4.9 Article use with phrasal verbs

The constructions used with phrasal verbs like *Abschied nehmen*, *in Druck geben*, *in Erfahrung bringen* are typically idiomatic, in particular in respect of the use of a definite article or no article with them, e.g. **zum** *Abschluss bringen* but **zu** *Ende bringen*, and a dictionary should be consulted. However, the following general rules apply:

- (i) **Infinitives used as nouns** have a **definite article** in phrasal verbs with

prepositions

ins Rollen kommen, **zum** Kochen bringen

(ii) **Feminine nouns in phrasal verbs with zu have a definite article**

zur Kenntnis bringen, **zur** Verfügung stehen

(iii) **Phrasal verbs with *außer* and *unter*, and most of those with *in* have no article**

außer Gefahr sein, jdn. **unter** Druck setzen, jdn. **in** Verlegenheit bringen

However, those with ***in*** followed by an infinitive used as a noun do have an article, see (i) above

(iv) **Most phrasal verbs with *gehen*, *halten* and *setzen* have no article**

in Erfüllung **gehen**, **in** Gang **halten**, **in** Brand **setzen**

(v) **Abstract nouns used with *haben* have no article**

Aufenthalt **haben**, Angst **haben**, Durst **haben**, Geduld **haben**, Mut **haben**

(vi) **Phrasal verbs consisting of a verb and an object noun with no preposition have no article**

Anspruch erheben, Antwort geben, Abschied nehmen, Krieg führen, Not leiden, Zeit sparen

(vii) **An article is used with phrasal verbs if the noun is qualified by an adjective**

This applies even if the phrasal verb normally lacks an article:

jdn. **in** Gefahr bringen
jdn. **in** (eine) große Gefahr bringen
jdn. **in** die größte Gefahr bringen

lead sb. into danger
lead sb. into great danger
lead sb. into the greatest danger

4.10 Article use with prepositions

Article use with prepositions is typically idiomatic. Usage in time phrases and phrasal verbs is dealt with in sections 4.5 and 4.9. More detail, in particular concerning differences between the English and German use of articles in set phrases with prepositions, can be found in [Chapter 18](#) under the individual prepositions. In this section we deal with some cases where some general rules apply.

- (i) The **definite article can be omitted** in prepositional phrases if the following **noun is qualified** by a genitive or another prepositional phrase:

auf Anraten des Arztes	<i>on the advice of a doctor</i>
in Gegenwart von zwei Kollegen	in the presence of two colleagues
die Studie, die Smith noch in Diensten	the study which Smith wrote in
der Bank verfasste (<i>Spiegel</i>)	the service of the bank
unter Ausnutzung aller Möglichkeiten	<i>by exploiting all possibilities</i>

- (ii) The indefinite article is often omitted in adverbial or adjectival phrases consisting of preposition and adjective plus noun. This is common where a set phrase is extended by an adjective and is characteristic of formal registers:

ein fahrender Virtuose mit italienischem	<i>a travelling virtuoso with an</i>
Namen (<i>Th. Mann</i>)	<i>Italian name</i>
ein Mann, der solchem Rat nicht folgte	a man who failed to follow this
und zu schrecklichem Ende kam	kind of advice and met a terrible
(<i>Hildesheimer</i>)	end
Wir erhielten den Betrag in frei	<i>We received the sum in a freely</i>
konvertierbarer Währung	<i>convertible currency</i>

This usage is also the norm in phrases with *mit* which are alternatives to adverbial genitives (see 2.3.3d):

Sie ging mit schnellem Schritt (= schnellen	<i>She crossed the road at a</i>
--	----------------------------------

Schrittes) über die Straße

fast pace

(iii) A few prepositions are used with no article in some or all of their uses. The most noteworthy (because of the differences to English) are the following:

mit is often used with no article when a part-whole relationship is involved:

ein Zimmer **mit Bad**
ein Hut **mit breitem Rand**

ein Opel **mit Schiebedach**
eine Suppe **mit Wursteinlage**

ohne is used with no article in German in contexts where English has an indefinite article:

Er geht gern **ohne Hut** Ich übersetzte den Text **ohne Wörterbuch**, **ohne Mühe**
Sie trat **ohne Brille** auf Wie hast du die Tür **ohne Schlüssel** aufgemacht?

The other prepositions typically used without a following article belong to formal written registers. More information is given under the individual prepositions in [Chapter 18](#).

ab	ab ersten/erstem Mai; ab Bahnhof; Preise ab Fabrik <i>ex works</i>
gemäß	Die Angelegenheit wurde gemäß Verordnung entschieden
infolge	Die Straße ist infolge schlechten Wetters gesperrt
kraft	Er handelte kraft Gesetzes
laut	Der Fahrer wurde laut Gesetz verurteilt
mangels	Der Angeklagte wurde mangels Beweises freigesprochen
per	per Einschreiben <i>by registered mail</i> ; per Anhalter fahren <i>to hitch-hike</i>
pro	
von ...	pro Stück; der Preis pro Tag <i>per day</i> , pro männlichen Angestellten
wegen	Diese Angelegenheit muss von Amts wegen geklärt werden
zwecks	Junge Dame möchte netten, gebildeten Herrn zwecks Heirat kennen lernen (FAZ)

Other determiners and pronouns

DETERMINERS are a limited set of small words used with NOUNS **to relate them to a particular context or situation**. They typically occupy the first position in a NOUN PHRASE, before any adjectives.

[Table 5.1](#) The noun phrase: other determiners

Determiner	Adjective/adjectival phrase	Noun
diese	heidnische	Gottheit
einige	fleißige	Studenten
ihr	sehr elegantes	Ensemble
jedes	in der Bundesrepublik geborene	Kind

The determiners include the DEFINITE and INDEFINITE ARTICLES, which are dealt with in [Chapter 4](#), and all other words used to determine nouns, like the DEMONSTRATIVES (*dieser, jener*, etc.), the POSSESSIVES (*mein, sein*, etc.), the INTERROGATIVES (e.g. *welcher?*) and indefinites (*einige, etliche*, etc.).

PRONOUNS are a limited set of small words which stand in place of NOUNS or NOUN PHRASES. In particular they stand for nouns or noun phrases which have already been mentioned or which do not need to be repeated in full. They include the PERSONAL PRONOUNS, which are dealt with in [Chapter 3](#), DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS, POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS, INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS (asking questions), the RELATIVE PRONOUNS (the ‘who’, ‘which’ and ‘that’ words) and INDEFINITE PRONOUNS.

Determiners and pronouns qualify or stand in place of nouns and in German,

they typically **DECLINE**, i.e. they have endings which indicate the same grammatical categories as nouns – CASE, NUMBER and GENDER. [Table 5.2](#) gives the DECLENSION of ***dieser*** ‘this’, which is one of the most frequent demonstratives and can be used as a determiner **or** a pronoun. **Many of the other determiners and pronouns have the same endings as *dieser*.**

[Table 5.2](#) Declension of *dieser*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	dies er	dies e	dies es	dies e
Accusative	dies en	dies e	dies es	dies e
Genitive	dies es	dies er	dies es	dies er
Dative	dies em	dies er	dies em	dies en

In German, many of the same basic forms can be used as determiners **or** pronouns, e.g.:

Dieses Auto fährt sehr schnell (determiner)	Dieses fährt aber schneller (pronoun)
Mein Auto fährt sehr schnell (determiner)	Meines fährt aber schneller (pronoun)

A few of them (like *mein/meines* in the example above) have a different declension depending on whether they are being used as determiners or pronouns, which is why it is important to be aware of the difference between them.

This chapter deals with the following sets of determiners and pronouns:

- **demonstratives** (section 5.1)
- **possessives** (section 5.2)
- **interrogatives** (section 5.3)
- the **relative pronouns** (section 5.4)
- **indefinites, quantifiers and other determiners and pronouns** (section 5.5)

5.1 Demonstratives

5.1.1 *der* ‘that’

***der* is the most frequent demonstrative in spoken German.** It can be used to point in a general way to something distant or something near at hand and thus it can be the equivalent of both ‘this’ and ‘that’.

(a) When used as a determiner, *der* has the same declension as the definite article

i.e. as given in [Table 4.2](#). However, it differs from the definite article in speech because it is always stressed, e.g. *den* [de: n], *der* [de:v], etc. It is thus quite distinct from the definite article, whose spoken forms are typically always unstressed and reduced, e.g. ‘n, d’n or d’r, etc., see 4.1.1. Compare:

Ich möchte ein Stück von **d’r** Wurst
Ich möchte ein Stück von **der** [de:v]
Wurst

I would like a piece of the sausage
I would like a piece of this/that
sausage

In written German the demonstrative force of *der* may sometimes be clear from the context, especially when a relative clause follows, e.g.:

Ich kann dir die Hefte der Zeitschrift schicken, die dir noch fehlen	<i>I can send you those issues of the journal which you haven’t got yet</i>
Bei der Lehrerin würde ich auch nichts lernen	<i>I wouldn’t learn anything from that teacher either</i>

In many contexts, though, it would be difficult to tell the demonstrative *der* apart from the definite article in writing, and *dieser* or *derjenige* is preferred. In colloquial speech the demonstrative force of *der* can be strengthened by adding *da* or *hier* after the noun, depending on whether ‘this’ or ‘that’ is meant, e.g. ***der Mann da*** ‘that man’, ***der Mann hier*** ‘this man’. These forms are not used in

writing.

In spoken German, especially in the South, *denen* is sometimes used rather than *den* in the dative plural, e.g. *Mit **denen** Sachen kann ich eh nichts anfangen*. This is considered non-standard.

(b) The declension of demonstrative *der* used as a pronoun

This is identical to the declension of the definite article, or *der* used as a determiner, **except in the genitive**, and in the **dative plural**. The forms are given in [Table 5.3](#).

[Table 5.3](#) Declension of the demonstrative pronoun *der*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	der	die	das	die
Accusative	den	die	das	die
Genitive	dessen	deren/derer	dessen	deren/derer
Dative	dem	der	dem	denen

The prepositions *halber*, *wegen* and *um* ... *willen* have special compounded forms of the genitive with - *t* - inserted, e.g. *derenthalben*, *dessentwegen*, *um derentwillen*, etc., see 18.4.1d and 18.4.4b.

(c) The use of *der* as a pronoun

When it is being used as a pronoun, *der* cannot be confused with the definite article, as there is no noun following, and it is used freely in writing. It usually corresponds to English ‘the one’/‘this one’/‘that one’:

mein Wagen und **der** meines Bruders
Die Sache ist nämlich **die**: Er ist schon
verheiratet
Diese Seife ist besser als **die**, die ich
gewöhnlich gebrauche

my car and my brother's
It's like this: he's already married
This soap is better than the one I
normally use
We cannot attach so much importance

Wir können dem nicht so viel Bedeutung beimessen	to that Those (ones) are too expensive for me
Die sind mir zu teuer	<i>The book's lying on the table. Yes, on</i>
Das Buch liegt auf dem Tisch. Ja, auf dem da drüben	<i>that one over there</i>

(d) Pronominal *der* is often used instead of a third person pronoun

This usage is frequent in writing to refer to things, but to refer to persons it is typical of everyday colloquial speech and considered non-standard, see 3.4.2:

Ist der Teller kaputt? Ja, den hat Astrid fallen lassen	<i>Is the plate broken? Yes, Astrid dropped it</i>
Keine Möwen. Die waren weiter draußen (Grass)	No gulls. They were further offshore
Hast du Peter gesehen? Ja, der ist gerade reingekommen	<i>Have you seen Peter? Yes, he's just come in.</i>

(e) *der* can be strengthened by the addition of *da* or *hier*

This usage is restricted to informal colloquial speech. It makes it more clear whether 'this one (here)' or 'that one (there)' is being referred to, e.g. *das da* 'that one', *das hier* 'this one'.

(f) The genitive of the pronoun *der* can be used for a possessive pronoun to avoid ambiguity

i.e. where it might not be completely clear what *sein* or *ihr* could refer to:

Sie war die Tochter des Schriftstellers Thomas Mann und dessen viertes Kind (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>She was the daughter of the writer Thomas Mann and his fourth child</i>
Dennoch wurden sie alle geprägt	Nevertheless they were all moulded by their

von ihrer Stadt und deren geistiger Tradition	city and its intellectual tradition
Erboste Bauern nahmen britische LKW-Fahrer gefangen und plünderten deren Konvois (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>Angry farmers held some British lorry-drivers captive and plundered their</i> (i.e. the lorry- drivers', not the farmers') <i>convoys</i>

In colloquial speech, the genitive of *der* is sometimes used instead of a possessive for emphasis, e.g. *Ich kann **deren** Mann nicht leiden.*

(g) The feminine singular and genitive plural forms *derer*

These are typically used to refer forwards, especially with a following relative clause (see also 5.4.1c). The traditional rule that it can **only** be used in this way is no longer valid:

Unverändert niedrig ist die Zahl derer , die Asyl in Deutschland erhalten (<i>NüN</i>)	<i>The number of those who have been granted asylum in Germany is unchanged and still low</i>
Wie soll man derer habhaft werden, wenn sie jemanden umgefahren haben? (<i>FR</i>)	<i>How can they be detained when they have knocked somebody down?</i>

(h) The pronoun *das* is used as an emphatic form of *es*

This is linked to the fact that *es* cannot be stressed (see 3.6). Like *es*, it can be used with either singular or plural forms of the verb *sein*. In the corresponding English constructions we distinguish between 'that' and 'those':

Das sind meine Bücher	<i>Those are my books</i>
Das ist mein Arm, meine Hand, mein Knie	<i>That is my arm, my hand, my knee</i>

A form of the prepositional adverb is normally used rather than a preposition followed by the demonstrative pronoun e.g. *damit* 'with that', *darin* 'in that'. The stress is on the first syllable (see 3.5.2a):

' **Da** mit kann man die Büchse doch nicht aufmachen, oder? *You can't open the can with that, can you?*

To refer to something near or something just mentioned, a prepositional adverb with *hier* - can be used, e.g. *hiermit* 'with this', *hierin* 'in this'

'**Hier** über lässt sich nichts mehr sagen *There is nothing more to be said about this*

Forms in *hie*-, e.g. *hiemit*, *hienach* are generally old-fashioned, but they are still occasionally found in Swiss or Austrian usage.

When a relative clause follows, a preposition followed by the demonstrative pronoun **is** used in written German (although the prepositional adverb may sometimes be heard in speech). See also 5.4.4:

Ich richtete meine ganze Aufmerksamkeit **auf** das (not darauf), was er erklärte *I focused my whole attention on what he was saying*

5.1.2 *dieser* 'this'

The declension of *dieser* is given in [Table 5.2](#). There is an increasing tendency to use the form *diesen* in the genitive singular masculine and neuter of the determiner rather than *dieses* if the noun has the ending *-(e)s*, e.g. *im Februar dies **en** Jahres (MM)* (for *dies **es** Jahres*). However, this usage is not generally accepted as standard.

(a) As a determiner and a pronoun *dieser* typically refers to something near at hand

It thus generally corresponds to English 'this'. As a determiner, *dieser* occurs in both spoken and written German, but as a pronoun it is mainly used in writing since spoken German tends to use *der* in this function (see 5.1.1):

Diese Erklärung ist unbefriedigend

This explanation is

Dieser Junge arbeitet aber gut
Er hat den kleinen Wagen nicht gekauft, weil
ihm **dieser** (*spoken: der hier*) viel besser
gefallen hat

unsatisfactory
That boy really does work well
*He didn't buy the small car,
because he liked this one much
better*

dieser is often used simply to point to an object or person in contexts where the difference between near and distant (i.e. between 'this one' and 'that one') is not crucial. In such contexts it often corresponds to English 'that', e.g. *Warum hast du dieses Top gekauft?* 'Why did you buy this/that top?'

(b) The short form *dies* is commonly used for *dieses* as a pronoun

It refers to something close by or recent and its use corresponds closely to that of English 'this':

Dies geschieht nicht oft Gerade **dies** hatte ich vergessen

dies, like *das*, can be used irrespective of gender or number, with a plural verb where appropriate: *Dies sind meine Schwestern; Dies ist meine Frau.*

The use of *dies* for *dieses* as a determiner in the nominative or accusative singular neuter is now old-fashioned, but it occurs occasionally in formal writing for stylistic effect, or to give a historical flavour, e.g. ***Dies** Werk malte Konrad Witz aus Basel (Borst).*

5.1.3 *jener* 'that'

jener declines like *dieser*, see [Table 5.2](#), and also has the same declension whether it is used as a determiner or a pronoun. In modern usage it is largely restricted to formal written German, especially in the following contexts:

(a) to contrast with *dieser*

Es war nicht die Absicht, dieses oder **jenes**
Verfahren zu verbieten (SGT)
Wir sprachen über dieses und **jenes** (*less*
formal: über dies und das)

*It was not the intention to forbid
this procedure or that one
We talked about this and that*

(b) to refer to something distant, but well-known

Werfen wir einen kurzen Blick über den
Eisernen Vorhang **jener** Zeit (Sonnenberg)

*Let us cast a short glance at the
Iron Curtain of those times*

(c) with a following relative clause

Deshalb hat er auch eine Menge Anhänger
unter **jenen**, die Comedy mögen (HMP)

*That is why he has a lot of fans
among those who like comedy*

5.1.4 *derjenige* ‘that’

Both parts of *derjenige* decline, as shown in [Table 5.4](#), the first part in the same way as the definite article (see [Table 4.2](#)), the second as a weak adjective (see [Table 6.4](#)).

[Table 5.4](#) Declension of *derjenige*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	derjenige	diejenige	dasjenige	diejenigen
Accusative	denjenigen	diejenige	dasjenige	diejenigen
Genitive	desjenigen	derjenigen	desjenigen	derjenigen
Dative	demjenigen	derjenigen	demjenigen	denjenigen

It is used as an emphatic demonstrative determiner or pronoun, typically with a following restrictive relative clause, corresponding to English ‘that (one), which/who’. Although it was originally more typical of formal and official registers, it is now quite frequent in speech as well as in writing.

Wir wollen **diejenigen** Schüler
herausfinden, die musikalisch begabt sind
Beihilfen sollen nur **demjenigen**
zufließen, der unter der Armutsgrenze lebt
(FR)

*We want to find those pupils who are
musically gifted
Assistance should only go to those
who are living below the poverty line*

5.1.5 *derselbe* ‘the same’

derselbe corresponds to English ‘the same’. Both parts decline, as with *derjenige* (see [Table 5.5](#)).

[Table 5.5](#) Declension of *derselbe*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	derselbe	dieselbe	dasselbe	dieselben
Accusative	denselben	dieselbe	dasselbe	dieselben
Genitive	desselben	derselben	desselben	derselben
Dative	demselben	derselben	demselben	denselben

Er besucht **dieselbe** Schule wie dein
Bruder

*He goes to the same school as your
brother*

Sind das **dieselben** ?

Are those the same?

Sie wohnt **im selben** Haus

She lives in the same house

Es läuft auf (ein und) **dasselbe** hinaus

It all comes to the same thing

Note that, unlike *derjenige*, it can be used with a contracted preposition, e.g. *am selben Tag, zur selben Zeit*.

Standard German insists on the distinction between *derselbe*, i.e. ‘the very same’, and *der gleiche*, i.e. ‘one which is similar’, e.g. *Er trägt den gleichen Hut* ‘He is wearing the same hat’, i.e. a similar one, whereas *Er trägt denselben Hut* would be nonsensical. However, this distinction is often ignored in speech and either are used in both senses. It is widely felt, though, that the distinction should be upheld, at least in writing.

5.1.6 *solch* and other equivalents of ‘such’

solch- occurs in a number of forms:

- **inflected *solcher***, which declines like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)), except that in the genitive singular masculine and neuter it has the ending *-en*, e.g. *Der Vorzug solch **en** Spiel **es*** (*Th. Mann*).
- **endingless *solch***, used with an indefinite article: *solch ein Unsinn*
- ***solch*** - used after the indefinite article *ein* or another determiner, with the endings of an adjective: *ein solches Buch*, *jeder solche Gedanke*, *alle solchen Frauen*

(a) German equivalents of ‘such’ as a determiner

(i) the most frequent alternatives as a determiner are ***ein solcher*** in the **singular** and inflected ***solche*** in the **plural**. This applies to both written and spoken German:

Eine solche Auflockerung könnte dem politischen Diskurs gut bekommen (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>Such a relaxation of tension could benefit the political debate</i>
Einen solchen Wagen würde ich nie kaufen	I would never buy a car like that You can tell people like that
Solchen Leuten kann man alles erzählen	anything
solche großen Häuser	<i>such big houses</i>

(ii) Inflected *solcher* as a determiner in the singular is found principally in formal registers. It has a rather old-fashioned or literary ring:

bei solchem Wetter	<i>in such weather</i>
ein Mann, der solchem Rat nicht folgte (<i>Hildesheimer</i>)	<i>a man who failed to follow such advice</i>

(iii) with a following adjective the most usual equivalent with singular count nouns followed by an adjective is *ein so*, or in informal register German *so ein* (see also (vi) below):

ein so großes Haus	}	<i>such a big house</i>
so ein großes Haus		

With plural count nouns and singular mass nouns followed by an adjective, inflected *solcher* is the norm in writing, but *so* is frequent in everyday speech:

so große Häuser (spoken)	}	<i>such big houses</i>
solche großen Häuser (written)		
bei so gutem Wetter (spoken)	}	<i>in such good weather</i>
bei solchem guten Wetter (written)		

(iv) In formal registers uninflected *solch* is not uncommon if an adjective follows. It also occurs in a few idiomatic phrases:

Das ist häufig die Gefahr nach solch guten Leistungen (NUZ)	<i>That is often the danger after such good results</i>
mit solch unermüdlichem Eifer	with such tireless enthusiasm
Solch dummes Gerede!	<i>Such stupid gossip!</i>

(v) In formal registers uninflected *solch* can be used as a determiner with a following indefinite article. This is more emphatic than if the article comes first:

Geprobt haben sie solch eine Situation allerdings nicht (NUZ).	<i>However, they haven't tested a situation like that</i>
---	--

Uninflected *solch* is sometimes used on its own in very formal registers before a singular neuter noun, e.g. *solch Wetter*. This sounds old-fashioned.

(vi) In informal colloquial speech, **so ein** is very frequent in the singular for 'such a', e.g. *in so einer Stadt*, *so ein Geschenk*. In the plural, simple *so* is frequent, e.g. *Das sind so Sachen*.

In practice, *so* and *ein* are used so often in rapid everyday speech that they have become fused and are interpreted as a single word **son** with its own endings, e.g.

son *altes Haus*, **sone** *nette Person*, mit **sonem** *Kerl*, and this is even used in the plural, e.g. **sone** *frechen Gören*. These forms are not accepted in standard German and not used in writing.

(b) German equivalents of ‘such’ as a pronoun

(i) The most frequent alternatives are *solche* (plural) and *so einer* (singular):

Ich habe solche oft gesehen	<i>I’ve often seen ones like that</i>
So eines kann ich mir nicht leisten	<i>I can’t afford one like that</i>

(ii) Singular *solcher* is used after *als*:

Der Fall als solcher interessiert mich	<i>The case as such interests me</i>
---	--------------------------------------

(iii) Singular (*k*) *ein solcher* is restricted to literary registers. In the singular it sounds rather stilted:

Sie hatte auch einen solchen	<i>She had one like that, too</i>
Leider haben wir keine solchen mehr	<i>I’m afraid we haven’t got any more like that</i>

(c) The adjective *derartig* is a common, more emphatic alternative to *solch* -

It is used with *ein* in the singular, or with no article in either singular or plural:

Er fuhr mit einer derartigen Geschwindigkeit gegen die Mauer, dass ... Erfahrung im Umgang mit derartiger Kälte hat niemand (<i>Bednarz</i>) Derartige Gerüchte hören wir oft	<i>He drove into the wall at such a speed, that ... Nobody has experience in dealing with that degree of cold We often hear rumours like those</i>
--	--

If another adjective follows, *derartig* may be uninflected, e.g. *Er fuhr mit einer*

derartig(en) hohen Geschwindigkeit gegen die Mauer, dass... In some contexts, though, there can be a difference in meaning. Compare *ein derartig dummes Geschwätz* (i.e. ‘gossip which is stupid to such an extent’) and *ein derartiges dummes Geschwätz* (i.e. ‘such gossip which is stupid’).

(d) *dergleichen* and *derlei*

dergleichen and *derlei* do not decline. They are used as determiners or pronouns meaning ‘suchlike’, ‘that kind/sort of’:

Dergleichen Behauptungen stören mich nichts dergleichen und dergleichen mehr (<i>abbrev.:</i> u.dgl.m.) Er hatte ein langes Messer oder dergleichen in der Tasche Die rotblonde Miss Leclerc hatte derlei Tricks nicht nötig (<i>BILD</i>) Sie sah derlei nicht ungern (<i>Jacob</i>)	<i>Assertions like that bother me</i> nothing of the kind and so forth He had a long knife or something of the kind in his pocket The strawberry blond Miss Leclerc didn’t need tricks like that <i>She wasn’t averse to that kind of thing</i>
--	--

5.2 Possessives

The POSSESSIVES indicate a relationship between two noun phrases where one in some sense ‘belongs’ to the other, e.g. *mein Buch* ‘my book’; *die Stadt und ihre Geschichte* ‘the city and its history’; *Ist das dein Fahrrad oder meines?* ‘Is that your bicycle or mine?’

5.2.1 The forms and declension of the possessives

(a) The basic forms of the possessives

In German there is a basic form of the possessive pronouns and determiners for each grammatical PERSON, and these are given in [Table 5.6](#).

[Table 5.6](#) Basic forms of the possessives

	Person	
Singular	1st	mein
	2nd	dein
	3rd masculine	sein
	feminine neuter	ihr sein
Plural	1st	unser
	2nd familiar	euer
	polite (sg./pl.) 3rd	Ihr ihr

(i) To refer back to **indefinites**, the **masculine** form **sein** is used, e.g.:

Wer hat **seine** Zahnbürste
vergessen?
Niemand hatte **sein** Heft mit

*Who has forgotten their toothbrush?
No-one had their exercise book with
them*

As the examples show, English can use the third person plural possessive in contexts like this, as a gender-neutral form, but there is no direct equivalent of this in German. The use of the masculine form has been the subject of substantial criticism, as it can be regarded as discriminatory, but none of the suggested solutions has yet been generally accepted.

(ii) A demonstrative is sometimes used instead of a third person possessive to avoid ambiguity, see 5.1.1f.

(b) When used as determiners the possessives have the same endings as the indefinite article

[Table 5.7](#) gives the forms of *mein* ‘my’ and *unser* ‘our’.

[Table 5.7](#) Declension of the possessive determiners

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
--	-----------	----------	--------	--------

Nominative	mein	meine	mein	meine
Accusative	meinen	meine	mein	meine
Genitive	meines	meiner	meines	meiner
Dative	meinem	meiner	meinem	meinen
Nominative	unser	unsere	unser	unsere
Accusative	unsere	unsere	unser	unsere
Genitive	unseres	unserer	unseres	unserer
Dative	unserem	unserer	unserem	unseren

(i) The - *er* of *unser* and *euer* is part of the root and **not an ending**. As [Table 5.7](#) shows, the endings are attached to this root.

(ii) When *unser* and *euer* have an ending, the - *e* - of the root is **often dropped**, e.g. *unsrer*, *unsren*, *eurer*, *euren*. Alternatively, the - *e*- of the endings - *en* or -*em* may be dropped, e.g. *unsern*, *unserm*, *euern*, *euer*m.

With *unser*, the full forms, as given in the table, are the more usual ones in written German, although the reduced forms, which are the norm in speech, are quite permissible.

With *euer*, the forms with no - *e*- in the root, i.e. *euren*, *eurer*, *eures*, *eurem*, are by far the most common in both spoken and written German.

In the genitive singular masculine and neuter the ending -*en* is now sometimes found if the noun has the ending -(e)s, e.g. *die Launen meinen Bruders*. This usage is increasingly common but it is generally considered to be incorrect.

(c) When used as pronouns, the possessives have the endings of *dieser*

[Table 5.8](#) gives the full forms of *meiner* ‘mine’ and *unserer* ‘ours’.

[Table 5.8](#) Declension of the possessive pronouns

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	meiner	meine	meines	meine

Accusative Genitive Dative	meinen meines meinem	meine meiner meiner	meines meines meinem	meine meiner meinen
Nominative Accusative Genitive Dative	unser unseren unseres unserem	unsere unsere unserer unserer	unser unser unseres unserem	unsere unsere unserer unseren

(i) Unlike the possessive determiners, the possessive pronouns have endings in the nominative singular masculine and the nominative/accusative singular neuter (i.e. *mein **er***, *mein **es***). Compare:

Das ist nicht **mein** Hut, sondern **deiner**

Hast du **dein** Fahrrad? Ich sehe **mein(e)s** nicht

Seine Sammlung ist größer als **meine**

Ihr Garten ist größer als **uns(e)rer**

Er sprach mit **meinen** Eltern, ich mit **seinen**

Ich nehme **uns(e)ren** Wagen. In **seinem** habe ich immer Angst

(ii) The - *e*- of the nominative/accusative neuter ending - *es* is often dropped in writing, and almost always in speech: *meins*, *deins*. With *unseres* and *eueres* the - *e*- of the ending is dropped: *unsers*, *euers*. Otherwise, *unserer* and *euerer* can drop the - *e*- of the root or the ending as with the possessive determiner, see (b) above.

(iii) Endingless forms of the possessive are occasionally found in set phrases, archaic expressions or poetic language:

Dein ist mein Herz!

Die Rache ist **mein**

Die Welt ist **unser**

Er hat **Mein** und **Dein** nie unterscheiden können

(d) Alternative forms of the possessive pronoun

There are two alternatives to the possessive pronouns *meiner*, *deiner*, etc. These

have the form of adjectives used after a definite article.

(i) In the first alternative adjective endings can simply be added to the basic possessive, e.g.:

der meine/der Meine ‘mine’; *der deine/der Deine* ‘yours’; *der uns(e)re/der Uns(e)re* ‘ours’, etc., e.g. *Seine Sammlung ist größer als die meine/Meine*

(ii) In the second alternative the adjective has *-ig-* inserted between the basic possessive and the adjective ending, e.g.:

der mein ige /der Mein ige ‘mine’, *der dein ige /Dein ige* ‘yours’, *der uns(e)r ige /Uns(e)r ige* ‘ours’, etc.

Both these forms can be spelled with a small or a capital initial letter (see 21.2.1g). They are found almost exclusively in formal written German and are much less frequent than *meiner*, etc. The first (*der meine*, etc.) is rather more emphatic than *meiner*, etc., while the second is current mainly in set phrases, e.g. *die Deinigen* ‘your people’ (i.e. your family); *Ich habe das Meinige getan* ‘I’ve done my bit’.

5.2.2 The use of the possessives

In a few contexts German and English differ in the use of possessives.

(a) A definite article is often used to refer to parts of the body and articles of clothing

e.g. *Sie hat sich **den** Arm gebrochen* ‘She has broken her arm’. Details are given in section 4.6.

(b) Some idiomatic equivalents

In some commonly used types of context German expresses possession in a different way to English:

Das gehört mir. Gehört das dir?	<i>That's mine. Is that yours?</i>
ein Freund von mir/einer meiner Freunde	a friend of mine
Freunde von mir	friends of mine
Das ist eins von meinen Büchern	<i>That's a book of mine</i>

5.3 Interrogatives

INTERROGATIVES are words used to ask a question. In English they typically begin with *wh-*, like *which* or *who*.

5.3.1 *welcher* 'which'

(a) *welcher* can be used as a determiner or a pronoun

- (i) It declines in exactly the same way as *dieser*, see [Table 5.2](#), and the forms are the same whether it is used as a determiner or a pronoun.

Welches Bier willst du trinken?	<i>Which beer do you want to drink?</i>
Welchen Zug nehmen wir denn?	Which train shall we take?
Aus welchem Land kommt sie denn?	Which country does she come from?
Welcher berühmte Schriftsteller hat diesen Roman geschrieben?	Which famous author wrote this novel?
Hier sind zwei gute Weine. Welchen möchtest du zuerst probieren?	Here are two good wines. Which one would you like to try first?
Er fragte mich, welchen (Wein) ich zuerst probieren wollte	<i>He asked me which (wine) I wanted to try first</i>

- (ii) In formal written German the endingless form **welch** is sometimes used before an adjective, as an alternative to the declined form:

Welch berühmter Schriftsteller hat diesen Roman geschrieben?
Die Künstler zeigten, **welch** reiches Kulturgut sie mitbrachten (MM)
Der Smogalarm machte erneut deutlich, in **welch hohem** Maße die Luft mit Giftstoffen verseucht ist (MM)

What famous author wrote this novel?
The artists showed what cultural riches they had brought with them
The smog alarm made it clear once again to what high degree the air is polluted with poisonous substances

(iii) In the **genitive singular masculine** and **neuter** the determiner can have the ending - **en** rather than - **es** if the following noun has the ending -(e)s:

Welch **en**/ Welch **es** Kindes Buch ist das?

Innerhalb **welch en** Zeitraumes müssen nicht bestandene Prüfungen wiederholt werden?

(Universität Innsbruck)

(iv) *welcher* can have the **neuter singular form *welches*** when it is used as a **pronoun** in an **indefinite sense** with the verb *sein*, irrespective of the gender and number of the noun it refers to:

Welches ist die jüngere Schwester?
Welches ist der längste Fluss in Amerika?

Welches sind die besten Zeitungen?

Using endings in agreement with the following noun would be equally possible in these examples: ***Welche*** ist die jüngere Schwester? etc.

(b) *welcher* can be used in exclamations with the force of English ‘What (a)...!’

Welcher Unterschied!
Welche Überraschung!

Welcher schöne Tag!
Welchen unglaublichen Unsinn hat er geredet!

Endingless ***welch*** can be used instead of declined *welcher* in exclamations if *ein*

or an adjective follows:

Welch ein Unterschied!	Welch (ein) schöner Tag!
Welch eine Überraschung!	Welch unglaublichen Unsinn hat er geredet!

This exclamatory use of *welch* (*er*) is mainly found in formal German. *was für* (*ein*) (see 5.3.2) is more current in speech.

The form **welcher** has a number of other uses:

- as a relative pronoun (= ‘who’, ‘which’), see 5.4.2
- as an indefinite (= ‘some’, ‘any’), see 5.5.26.

5.3.2 *was für ein* ‘what kind of (a)’

(a) *was für ein* can be used as a determiner or a pronoun

(i) When *was für ein* is used as a **determiner** in the singular, *ein* declines like the indefinite article, see [Table 4.3](#):

Was für ein Mensch ist sie denn?	<i>What sort of person is she?</i>
Was für einen Wein trinken Sie am liebsten?	What sort of wine do you like to drink most?
Aus was für einer Familie stammt er?	What kind of a family does he come from?
Sie können sich denken, in was für einer schwierigen Lage ich mich befand	<i>You can imagine what (kind of) an awkward situation I found myself in</i>

The case of *ein* depends on the role of the noun phrase in the sentence, not on the case usually taken by the preposition *für*.

(ii) Simple *was für*, without *ein*, is used in the plural and before mass nouns in the singular

Was für ausländische Marken haben	<i>What kinds of foreign stamps do you</i>
--	--

Sie?
Was für Käse soll ich kaufen?

have?
What kind of cheese shall I buy?

(iii) When used as a **pronoun**, *was für einer* ‘what kind (of a one)’ has the **endings** of the pronoun *einer* given in [Table 5.10](#):

Er hat sich ein neues Auto gekauft. **Was für** *He has bought a new car. What*
ein(e)s ? *kind?*

(iv) In the plural *was für welche* is used

Ich habe Blumen gebracht. **Was für** *I have brought some flowers. What*
welche ? *kind?*

was für welcher is used in place of *was für einer* in the singular in colloquial speech, especially in North Germany, e.g. *Er hat einen neuen Wagen gekauft. Was für welchen?*

For the use of *was für (ein)* in concessive clauses, see 17.6.2c.

(b) *was* is often separated from *für ein*

The phrase with *für* then follows the verb. This alternative is especially frequent in speech, but the construction is also used in writing:

Was hast du denn **für ein** Auto gekauft?

Was sind das **für** Vögel?

(c) *was für ein* can be used in exclamations (= ‘What (a) ...!’)

It is in practice commoner than *welcher* (see 5.3.1b), especially in less formal registers. In this usage the separated form is more frequent:

Was für eine Chance!

What a chance!

Was für herrliche Blumen!	What lovely flowers!
Er ist ein Schauspieler – und was für einer !	He's an actor – and what an actor!
Was sind das für wunderschöne Häuser!	<i>What lovely houses these are!</i>

If there is a verb in these exclamations, it may, alternatively, go to the end, as in a subordinate clause, e.g. *Was für wunderschöne Häuser das **sind** !*

(d) In colloquial speech *was für einer* is often used for *welcher* 'which'

This usage is not accepted as standard German.

Was für ein Kleid ziehst du an?	<i>Which dress are you going to wear?</i>
--	---

5.3.3 *wer, was* 'who', 'what'

(a) *wer* and *was* are only used as pronouns

(i) *wer*, like English 'who', only refers to **persons**. It does not distinguish gender and it has the following case forms:

Nominative	wer?
Accusative	wen?
Genitive	wessen?
Dative	wem?

Wer hat diesen Brief geschrieben?	<i>Who wrote this letter?</i>
Wen hast du heute gesprochen?	Who(m) did you speak to today?
Wem wollten sie vorhin helfen?	Who(m) did they want to help just now?
Mit wem hast du gespielt?	Who(m) did you play with?
Wessen Bücher sind das?	Whose books are those?
Ich kann Ihnen sagen, wer gespielt hat	<i>I can tell you who was playing</i>

(ii) **was**, like English ‘what’, only refers to **things**. Its only case form is the genitive **wessen**?

Was bewegt sich dort im Gebüsch?	<i>What is moving there in the bushes?</i>
Was hat sie dir zum Geburtstag geschenkt?	What did she give you for your birthday?
Wessen schämst du dich?	What are you ashamed of?
Weißt du, was er getan hat?	<i>Do you know what he did?</i>

(iii) The genitive form **wessen**, whether referring to people or things, is felt to be clumsy and tends to be avoided nowadays, even in written German. Thus *Wem gehören diese Bücher?* is used rather than *Wessen Bücher sind das?* and *Warum schämst du dich?* rather than *Wessen schämst du dich?*

As *was* has no dative, a paraphrase has to be used in contexts where it would be needed, e.g.:

Welcher Ursache kann man seinen Erfolg zuschreiben?	<i>To what can one ascribe his success?</i> (Literally: ‘To what cause...?’)
--	---

(b) Nominative **wer** and **was** are followed in most contexts by a singular verb

(i) Compare the examples in (a) above and the following:

Wer kommt denn morgen?	<i>Who’s coming tomorrow?</i>
Was liegt dort in der Ecke?	<i>What’s that lying there in the corner?</i>

(ii) However, with *sein* the appropriate singular or plural form of the verb is used, as in English:

Wer ist das an der Tür?	<i>Who’s that at the door?</i>
Wer sind diese Leute?	Who are those people?
Was ist der Vogel da?	What’s that bird there?
Was sind die längsten Flüsse der	<i>What are the longest rivers in the</i>

Welt?

world?

(iii) To emphasize quantity, *alles* is often added to sentences with *wer* and *was*. This usage is typical of colloquial speech:

Wen kennen Sie hier **alles** ?
Was hat er denn **alles** gefragt?

What people do you know here?
What were the things he asked?

(c) *was* is not used in combination with most prepositions

The compound forms *wo(r) + preposition*, e.g. *woran*, *womit*, *wozu*, etc., are used instead.

(i) These forms are like those of the prepositional adverb with *da(r)-*, see 3.5:

Womit schreibst du?
Worüber sprechen Sie?
Weißt du, **worauf** wir warten?

What are you writing with?
What are you talking about?
Do you know what we are waiting for?

Some prepositions are not used in the form with *wo(r) -: außer, gegenüber, hinter, neben, ohne, seit, zwischen*.

(ii) The forms *wodurch*, *wonach*, *wovon* and *wozu* can only be used if there is no idea of movement involved, e.g.:

Wodurch weiß er das?
Wonach soll man sich denn richten?
Wovon sollen wir leben?
Wozu gebraucht man das?

How is it that he knows that?
By what is one to be guided?
What are we to live on?
What is that used for?

Compare: *durch was?* ‘through what?’, *von wo?* or *woher?* ‘where.. . from?’, *wohin?* ‘where.. . to?’

(iii) In colloquial German *was* is often used with a preposition instead of *wo(r) + preposition*, e.g. *Von was sollen wir leben? Mit was schreibst du?* This

usage is very frequent in speech, but it is not regarded as acceptable in standard German, and avoided in writing.

(d) *wer* and *was* are often used in exclamations

Wer hätte so was erwartet!	<i>Who would have expected such a thing!</i>
Wem hat er nicht alles geholfen!	Who(m) hasn't he helped!
Was haben wir gelacht!	How we laughed!
Was er nicht alles tut!	<i>The things he does!</i>

(e) *was* can be followed by an adjective used as a noun, with the neuter ending - *es*

See 6.2.4 for further details on these forms. The adjective is separated from *was* and placed later in the sentence:

Was haben sie Wichtiges besprochen?	<i>What important matters did they</i>
Was ist Komisches dran?	<i>discuss?</i>
Was könnt ihr hier anderes erwarten?	What's funny about it?
(<i>Fallada</i>)	<i>What else can you expect here?</i>

(f) *was* can be used in the sense of 'why?' or 'what for?'

This usage is typical of informal speech:

Was sitzt ihr da rum?	<i>What are you doing just sitting around?</i>
------------------------------	--

was used like this often carries a tone of reproach.

(g) Idiomatic differences between German and English

In a few contexts German has *wie* where English uses 'what'.

Wie ist Ihr Name, bitte?
Wie heißt Ihr Bruder?
Wie ist das Buch?

What is your name, please?
What's your brother called?
What's the book like?

wer and **was** have a number of other uses:

- (i) as relative pronouns (= 'who', 'which', 'that') in some contexts, see 5.4.3 and 5.4.5.
- (ii) in some concessive clauses (i.e. = 'whoever', 'whatever'), see 17.6.2.
- (iii) colloquially, as an indefinite (i.e. = 'someone'), see 5.5.27.

5.4 Relative pronouns

RELATIVE PRONOUNS introduce subordinate clauses (called RELATIVE CLAUSES) which describe or qualify nouns, e.g. *die Frau, **die** heute kommt* 'the woman **who** is coming today'; *das Buch, **das** ich gerade lese* 'the book **which** I am just reading'. As they qualify nouns they have the same function in practice as adjectives.

In English, we often drop a relative pronoun, especially in speech, e.g. The book (**which**) I am just reading. In German, by contrast, the relative pronoun is **never** omitted.

5.4.1 *der* 'who', 'which', 'that'

(a) *der* is the most frequent relative pronoun in German

der declines to indicate **gender**, **number** and **case**. Its forms are given in [Table 5.9](#); they are almost identical to those of the demonstrative pronoun *der*, see 5.1.1.

[Table 5.9](#) Declension of the relative pronoun *der*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural

Nominative	der	die	das	die
Accusative	den	die	das	die
Genitive	dessen	deren	dessen	deren
Dative	dem	der	dem	denen

der takes its **gender** and **number** from the noun it refers to, e.g.:

der Mann, der heute zu uns kommt	(masculine)
die Frau, die heute zu uns kommt	(feminine)
das Kind, das heute zu uns kommt	(neuter)
die Leute, die heute zu uns kommen	(plural)

Its **case** is determined by the **role** it plays in the **relative clause**:

der Mann, der zu uns kommt	(subject of <i>kommt</i>)
den Mann, den ich kenne	(accusative object of <i>kenne</i>)
der Mann, dem ich helfen musste	(dative object of <i>helfen</i>)
der Mann, mit dem sie gekommen ist	(after preposition <i>mit</i>)

(b) Relative clauses are less frequent in spoken German than in writing

In speech, a construction with a main clause (and the verb in second place) and the demonstrative pronoun *der* is often used rather than a subordinate relative clause (with the verb at the end). This is usually considered to be poor style in writing, unless colloquial speech is being imitated, as in the following examples:

Er trug ein Heft bei sich, in dem standen die Namen der fünfzig Verräter (E.W. Heine)	<i>He had a little book with him in which the names of the fifty traitors were written down</i>
Es gibt Leute, die freuen sich über die Fahrt (Bichsel)	<i>There are people who are pleased about the trip</i>

In formal registers a full relative clause would be expected, e.g. *Er trug ein Heft bei sich, in dem die Namen der fünfzig Verräter standen.*

(c) The genitive of *der*

(i) The genitive forms of *der* correspond to English 'whose' or 'of which':

die Frau, deren Namen ich immer vergesse	<i>the woman whose name I always forget</i>
ein Mann, von dessen Erfolg ich hörte	<i>a man of whose success I heard</i>
Sie blickten auf das Mietshaus gegenüber, in dessen Erdgeschoss sich eine Schreibwarenhandlung befand	<i>They looked out on the apartment house opposite, on the ground floor of which there was a stationer's</i>

It is incorrect (though a common mistake by Germans) to decline *dessen* and *deren*, e.g. *ein Mann, von dessen* (not *dess **em***) *Erfolg ich hörte*.

(ii) In the genitive plural and the genitive singular feminine *derer* is sometimes used rather than *deren*:

Für viele Medikamente gelten Wartezeiten, innerhalb derer die Tiere nicht geschlachtet werden dürfen (<i>BrZ</i>)	<i>For many medicines waiting periods are prescribed during which the animals are not allowed to be slaughtered</i>
das Vorbild der deutschen Widerstandskämpfer, derer zum 20. Juli überall gedacht wurde (<i>RhZ</i>) die ungewöhnliche Autorität, derer sich die katholischen Bischöfe in Polen erfreuen (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>the example of the German resistance fighters who were remembered everywhere on the 20th of July the extraordinary authority which is enjoyed by the Catholic bishops in Poland</i>

This usage was traditionally considered incorrect, but *derer* is in practice now at least as frequent as *deren*, especially in the genitive plural. However, *deren* is preferred if a noun follows: *die Frau, **deren** Tochter du kennst*.

(iii) After prepositions, the shorter form *der* can be used as an alternative to *deren*:

eine lange Übergangszeit von sechs	<i>a long transitional period of six</i>
------------------------------------	--

Jahren, innerhalb der die Länder die Juristenausbildung umstellen können (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>years, within which the Länder can reorganize the training of lawyers</i>
---	--

(iv) Constructions of the type ‘one of whom’, ‘most of which’, ‘some of which’ correspond to constructions with *von denen* in German:

die Studenten, von denen ich einen nicht kenne	<i>the students, one of whom I don't know</i>
eine Anzahl Jungen, von denen ich die meisten kenne	<i>a number of boys, most of whom I know</i>
viele Bilder, von denen einige ganz gut sind	<i>a lot of pictures, some of which are quite good</i>

(v) *dessen* and *deren* are compounded with - *halben*, -*wegen* and -*willen* with the insertion of a - *t*-, e.g. *derentwegen*, *um dessentwillen*:

ein charismatischer, weltberühmter Darsteller, dessentwegen die Frauen in Ohnmacht fallen (<i>Presse</i>)	<i>a charismatic, world-famous actor on whose account women faint</i>
--	---

(d) Relative pronouns with first and second person personal pronouns

Normal usage is for the pronoun to be repeated in the relative clause, e.g.:

du, der/die du ja nicht alles wissen kannst für mich, die ich noch gar nicht ordentlich lesen konnte (<i>Dönhoff</i>) ich, der ich seit 20 Jahren seinem Volke diene	<i>you, who cannot know everything for me, who wasn't yet able to read properly I, who have been serving my people for 20 years</i>
--	---

The alternative construction with a third person verb, e.g. *ich, **der** seit 20 Jahren seinem Volke **dient*** (FAZ), is possible, but less frequent in practice. It is most common when the relative pronoun is separated from the personal pronoun by

other words, e.g. *Was kannst du tun, der nicht alles wissen kann.*

5.4.2 *welcher* ‘who’, ‘which’, ‘that’

(a) *welcher* is chiefly used as a stylistic variant of *der*

It has the same endings as *dieser*, see [Table 5.2](#), but it is not normally used in the genitive. It is restricted to formal written German, and even there it is much less frequent than *der*.

die Gerüchte, welche über die wirtschaftliche Lage meines Vaters am Orte umgelaufen waren (<i>Th. Mann</i>)	<i>the rumours which had been circulating in the town about my father's financial situation</i>
Der Herr tat doch immer so, als umgäbe ihn eine vielköpfige Familie, welcher er Anweisungen zu geben hätte (<i>Grass</i>)	<i>The gentleman always acted as if he was surrounded by a large family to which he had to give instructions</i>

It is perhaps most often used now to avoid repeating forms of *der*, e.g. *Die, welche zuletzt kamen, waren erschöpft*. However, it is never necessary in such contexts – compare, as perfectly acceptable (see 5.4.5b): *Die, die gingen, haben in der DDR mehr verändert, als die, die geblieben sind* (FR).

(b) *welcher* is used before a noun which refers back to part or whole of the preceding clause

This use, which is limited to formal registers, corresponds to that of English ‘which’. In this construction *welcher* agrees with the following noun for case, number and gender:

Er wurde zum Stadtdirektor ernannt, welches Amt er gewissenhaft verwaltete	<i>He was appointed town clerk, which office he administered conscientiously</i>
Er sagte ihr, sie müsse den Betrag sofort zurückzahlen, welcher Forderung sie	<i>He told her she had to repay the</i>

dann auch nachging

*amount immediately, which request
she then complied with*

5.4.3 was as a relative pronoun

In a few contexts, *was* is used as a relative pronoun. Its only case form when used like this is the genitive *wessen*, although this tends to be avoided. It occurs in the following cases:

(a) After neuter indefinites

i.e. *alles, einiges, etwas, folgendes, manche s, nichts, vieles, wenig*s:

Nichts/Etwas/Alles, was er sagte, war mir neu	<i>Nothing/Something/Everything (that) he said was new to me</i>
Sie mieden alles, was ihre Unabhängigkeit einschränken könnte (Walser)	<i>They avoided anything which might restrict their independence</i>

After *etwas*, *das* can be used rather than *was*:

Da tat Gregorius etwas, das er von sich aus noch nie getan hatte (P. Mercier)	<i>Then Gregorius did something which he had never done before of his own accord</i>
Ich erinnere mich an etwas Merkwürdiges, das er sagte	<i>I remember something strange that he said</i>

das is occasionally found after other indefinites, but this usage is considered incorrect.

- (i) After prepositions, forms of *was* are usually replaced by the prepositional adverb in *wo (r)*-, see 5.4.4b.
- (ii) In colloquial speech *was* is often heard for *das* to refer to a neuter noun, e.g. *das Buch, was er mir geliehen hat*. This usage is not standard.

(b) After a neuter adjective used as a noun referring to something indefinite

Das Richtige, was man sich ansehen müsste, finden wir nie (<i>Fallada</i>)	<i>The right things [in museums] that one ought to look at, we never find</i>
Das Erste, was Evelyn sah, waren Mariannes Augen (<i>Baum</i>)	<i>The first thing Evelyn saw was Marianne's eyes</i>

Less frequently, *das* is used in these contexts, e.g. *Das Gute, **das** er getan hat, wird ihn überdauern.* However, *was* is always used after superlatives, e.g. *Das Beste, **was** du machen könntest.*

(c) After the indefinite demonstrative *das*

Eben das, was uns fehlte, hat er uns verweigert	<i>He denied us just what we were lacking</i>
--	---

If *das* is in the genitive or dative, or after a preposition, it cannot be omitted. This differs from English, where often only 'what' is needed. Compare:

Ich hörte nichts von dem, was er mir sagte eine Antwort auf das, was er gerade dachte (<i>Walser</i>)	<i>I didn't hear anything of what he said to me</i>
ein eifriger Leser dessen, was neu auf den Markt kommt (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>an answer to what he was just thinking</i>
	<i>a keen reader of what is new on the market</i>

(d) To refer back to a whole clause

Er hat sein Examen bestanden, was mich sehr erstaunt	<i>He has passed his examination, which surprises me very much</i>
Er sagte, er hätte mich damals gesehen, was ich nicht glauben konnte	<i>He said he had seen me then, which I couldn't believe</i>

5.4.4 Relative pronouns with prepositions

(a) The usual construction is to introduce the relative clause with *der* following the preposition

The relative pronoun *der* is in the **case** determined by the **preposition** (in the example below the **dative**, since *mit* is followed by the dative), and its **number** and **gender** are determined by the noun which the clause qualifies, in this example **masculine singular**, agreeing with *der Ball*:

der Ball, mit dem der Junge spielt	{	<i>the ball with which the boy is playing</i> <i>the ball which the boy is playing with</i> <i>the ball the boy is playing with</i>
---	---	---

The German construction corresponds closely to that of the first English equivalent given, which is more typical of formal registers than those which are very common in spoken English with a 'stranded' preposition at the end of the clause, possibly with the relative pronoun omitted entirely, as in the last equivalent. Constructions like these are not possible in German, which only has the one relative clause construction in standard usage. Compare these further examples:

die Frau, auf die Sie warten	{	<i>the woman for whom you are waiting</i> <i>the woman (who) you are waiting for</i>
der Stuhl, auf den du dich setzen wolltest	{	<i>the chair on which you wanted to sit down</i> <i>the chair (which) you wanted to sit down on</i>
der Stuhl, auf dem du sitzt	{	<i>the chair on which you are sitting</i> <i>the chair (which) you are sitting on</i>
die Stadt, in der ich wohne	{	<i>the town in which I live</i> <i>the town (which) I live in</i>

(b) The form *wo(r) + preposition* as a relative pronoun

The forms of the prepositional adverb in *wo(r)-* (e.g. *worauf*, *woran*, *wovon*, etc., see 5.3.3c) are used as relative pronouns in some constructions.

(i) *wo(r) + preposition* is used in those contexts where *was* is used as a relative pronoun (see 5.4.3):

etwas, woran ich mich nicht mehr recht erinnern konnte	<i>something which I couldn't remember properly any more</i>
Es gibt nichts, womit man diese Ablehnung begründen könnte	There is no reason by which this refusal might be justified
Es kam etwas, womit kein Mensch auf der Welt hätte rechnen können (<i>Süßkind</i>)	Something came which nobody on earth could have reckoned with
Er hat sein Examen bestanden, worüber ich mich freue	<i>He has passed his examination, which I am very pleased about</i>

Preposition + *das* (*dem*, if the preposition takes the dative) can be used instead of *wo(r) + preposition*, most frequently after *etwas*, e.g.:

etwas, **an das** ich mich nicht mehr recht erinnern konnte

nichts, **mit dem** man diese Ablehnung begründen könnte

Preposition + *was* is not uncommon in these contexts, but it is principally colloquial and not universally accepted as standard:

etwas, **an was** ich mich nicht mehr recht erinnern konnte

nichts, **mit was** man diese Ablehnung begründen könnte

(ii) *wo(r) + preposition* used to be a common alternative to the preposition followed by *der* to refer to things, e.g. *das Heim, worin ich geboren wurde* (*Th. Mann*). This usage is now unusual even in formal registers.

The use of the prepositional adverb with *da(r)* - (e.g. *darauf*, *daran*, cf. 3.5) as a relative pronoun to refer to things, e.g. *der Dolch, damit er sich erstach*,

is now wholly obsolete.

(iii) *wo(r)* + preposition is sometimes split (in a similar way to *da(r)* + preposition, see 3.5.2c), e.g.:

etwas, wo ich mich nicht mit abfinden kann	<i>That is something I</i>
(standard: womit ich mich nicht abfinden kann)	<i>can't get used to</i>

This usage is widespread in speech, especially in North Germany, but it is considered non-standard.

(c) In spoken German **wo** is often combined with a prepositional adverb later in the clause

Da in der Ecke ist das Sofa, wo du d(a)rauf schlafen kannst	<i>There in the corner is the sofa you</i>
(standard: auf dem du schlafen kannst)	<i>can sleep on</i>

This is probably the most frequent alternative in informal colloquial speech, but it is considered unacceptable in formal, especially written registers. The variation on this construction with a simple preposition, e.g. *der Ball, wo der Junge mit spielt* is if anything even less acceptable, although it, too, is very frequent in speech.

5.4.5 German equivalents of 'the one who', 'he/she who', 'that which'

There are a number of German equivalents for these English constructions.

(a) *wer* and *was* can be used in generalizations

Wer viele Freunde hat, ist glücklich	<i>Whoever has many friends is happy</i>
Wer wagt, gewinnt	<i>Who dares wins</i>

Und was noch schlimmer ist, er merkt es selber nicht	And what is worse, he doesn't realize it himself
Was du sagst, stimmt nicht	<i>What you say is not right</i>

If there is a difference in case or construction between the two clauses, an appropriate demonstrative pronoun can be added to begin the main clause:

Wen es zum Lehrerberuf hinzieht, der bevorzugt eher die philosophischen Fächer	<i>Those who are attracted to the teaching profession favour Arts subjects</i>
Was wir getan haben, darüber müssen wir auch Rechenschaft ablegen	<i>What we have done we shall also have to answer for</i>

Often, though, no such clarifying demonstrative pronoun is used:

Wen es zum Lehrerberuf hinzieht, bevorzugt eher die philosophischen Fächer (*Zeit*)

(b) Relative pronouns following demonstrative pronouns

The following alternatives are found:

(i) demonstrative *der* followed by relative *der*. This is the commonest alternative, despite the repetition:

Die, die gingen, haben in der DDR mehr verändert, als die, die blieben (<i>FR</i>)	<i>Those who left changed more in the GDR than those who stayed</i>
---	---

(ii) in formal registers, demonstrative *der* can be followed by relative *welcher*:

Die, welche ich kaufen wollte, waren mir zu teuer	<i>The ones I wanted to buy were too expensive for me</i>
---	---

(iii) demonstrative *derjenige* followed by relative *der* (or, in formal registers, *welcher*). This is frequent in both speech and writing:

Diejenigen, die (welche) in den hinteren Reihen saßen, konnten nichts sehen	<i>The ones who were sitting in the back rows couldn't see anything</i>
--	---

(iv) demonstrative *jener* followed by relative *der* (or *welcher*). This is not uncommon in formal writing:

bei jenen, die es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht haben, Schüler zu fördern (MM)	<i>with those who have made it their business to support schoolchildren</i>
---	---

(v) *der* can be used as a compound relative (e.g. 'he who'). This is common in speech:

Die hier sitzen, sind Verfluchte (Wolf)	<i>Those who are sitting here are cursed</i>
Der ihm Brötchen und Bockwurst verkaufte, kam aus Winsen an der Luhe (Surminski)	<i>The man who sold him rolls and sausage came from Winsen an der Luhe</i>

5.4.6 Other forms of the relative pronoun

(a) To refer to a place, **wo** can be used as a relative pronoun

This is an acceptable alternative to using *der* with a preposition:

die Stadt, wo (or: in der) ich wohne	<i>the town where I live</i>
---	------------------------------

If motion to or from a place is involved, *wohin* or *woher* are used:

die Stadt, wohin (or: in die) ich ging	<i>the town to which I went</i>
das Dorf, woher (or: aus dem) er kam	<i>the village from which he came</i>

The use of *wo* as a general relative pronoun (e.g. *die Frau, wo jetzt kommt*) is a very widespread non-standard regionalism.

(b) Usage with time words

In such contexts English often uses *when* as a relative. A number of alternatives exist in German, depending on register:

(i) Preposition with *der* is the most widely accepted form for writing:

Den Tag, an dem er ankam, werde ich nie vergessen in einer Zeit, in der die Jugend immer unabhängiger wird	<i>I shall never forget the day when he arrived at a time when young people are becoming more and more independent</i>
---	--

(ii) *als* (for past time) or *wenn* (for present or future time) are possible alternatives. *da* is sometimes used in formal (especially literary) German:

In dem Augenblick, als der Hund aufsprang, schrie er (<i>Valentin</i>) an seinem nächsten Geburtstag, wenn er volljährig wird Ach, wo sind die Zeiten, da Pinneberg sich für einen guten Verkäufer hielt? (<i>Fallada</i>)	<i>At the moment when the dog jumped up, he cried out on his next birthday, when he comes of age Alas, where are the days when Pinneberg considered himself a good salesman?</i>
---	--

(iii) The use of *wo* as a relative indicating time is common, especially in speech, and it is frequently found in writing. However, many Germans do not consider it to be standard and prefer other alternatives in formal registers:

im Augenblick, wo er die Tür aufmachte jetzt, wo ich das weiß Wir leben in einer Zeit, wo Verkaufen arm macht (<i>Remarque</i>)	<i>at the moment when he opened the door now that I know that We live in a time when selling makes one poor</i>
---	---

(c) *wie* is used to indicate manner, especially following *die Art*

die Art, **wie** er zu mir sprach
so, **wie** ich es gewohnt bin

*the manner in which he spoke to me
just as I am used to*

(d) **warum** is used to indicate cause, chiefly after *der Grund*

weshalb is an alternative in formal registers:

der Grund, **warum** (weshalb) ich nach Aachen
ging

*the reason why I went to
Aachen*

5.5 Indefinites, quantifiers and other determiners and pronouns

This section deals with the meaning and use of the remaining determiners and pronouns, in alphabetical order, as listed in [Table 5.10](#) with their most frequent English equivalents.

[Table 5.10](#) Indefinites, quantifiers and other determiners and pronouns

aller, all	<i>all (the)</i>	irgend(-)	<i>some-</i>	mehrere	<i>several</i>
ander	<i>(the) other</i>	jeder	<i>each, every</i>	meinesgleichen	<i>people like me</i>
beide(s)	<i>both</i>	jedermann	<i>everyone</i>	nichts	<i>nothing</i>
einer	<i>one</i>	jedweder	<i>each, every</i>	sämtlich(e)	<i>all (the)</i>
ein bisschen	<i>a little</i>	jeglicher	<i>each, every</i>	unsereiner	<i>the likes of us</i>
ein paar	<i>a few</i>	jemand,	<i>someone,</i>	viel, viele	<i>much, many</i>
ein wenig	<i>a little</i>	niemand	<i>no-one</i>	wenig, wenige	<i>a little, a few</i>
einige(r)	<i>some</i>	kein(er)	<i>no, none</i>	welcher	<i>some</i>
etliche	<i>some</i>	lauter	<i>nothing but</i>	wer	<i>someone</i>
etwas	<i>something</i>	man	<i>one</i>		
folgende(r)	<i>the following</i>	manch(er)	<i>some</i>		

The declension of adjectives after these determiners is explained in 6.1.4.

5.5.1 *aller, alle* ‘all (the)’

(a) ***all-*** ‘all (the)’, used as a determiner, has a number of alternative forms

(i) Inflected ***aller***, with the endings of ***dieser*** (see [Table 5.2](#)), used on its own. A following adjective has ‘weak’ endings:

Alle Kinder spielen gern	<i>All children like playing</i>
Alle Schüler waren gekommen	All the pupils had come
mit allen denkbaren Mitteln	with all conceivable means
alles Glück dieser Erde	<i>all the happiness of this world</i>

This is the commonest alternative in the plural, especially in the nominative and accusative, but in the singular it is largely restricted to formal registers and set phrases. Plural *alle* may correspond to English ‘all the’ or ‘all (of) the’, e.g. *alle Schüler* ‘all the pupils’/‘all of the pupils’. *alle* is **never** followed by a genitive.

In the genitive singular masculine and neuter, ***all*** - has the ending - ***en*** rather than - ***es*** if the noun has the ending -(e)s, e.g. *die Grenzen **allen*** (less frequent: ***alles** Wissens*; *solch verfehlte Ablehnung **allen** Verhandeln* (*Zeit*)).

(ii) Inflected ***aller*** followed by the definite article:

alle die Bücher	<i>all the books</i>
alle die Mühe	<i>all the trouble</i>

This is quite common in the plural, especially in colloquial speech, and with feminine nouns in the nominative and accusative singular.

(iii) Uninflected ***all*** followed by the definite article:

all das schlechte Wetter	<i>all the bad weather</i>
all die Schüler	all the pupils
mit all dem Geld	<i>with all the money</i>

This is the most frequent alternative in the singular, and it is quite often used in the plural. Attempts to establish a consistent difference of meaning between inflected and uninflected forms are unconvincing.

The most idiomatic equivalent of English *all* with a singular noun is often a phrase with *ganz*, see (g) below.

(b) *all* - is often used in conjunction with another determiner

In the plural both inflected and uninflected forms are found, but in the singular only uninflected *all* is used:

all mein Geld

von **all** diesem Brot

all/alle meine Brüder

nach **all** ihrer Mühe

mit **all/allen** diesen Schwierigkeiten

Only the inflected form is used before *solch*, which then has the endings of an adjective, e.g. *alle solchen Frauen*.

(c) *all* - used as a pronoun declines like *dieser*

(see [Table 5.2](#)), but it is not used in the genitive singular. The neuter singular *alles* is used for ‘everything’, the plural *alle* for ‘everyone’:

Alles ist bereit	<i>Everything is ready</i>
Ich bin mit allem einverstanden	I agree to everything
Alle waren anwesend	Everybody was present
Sind das alle ?	<i>Is that all (of them)?</i>

(d) Plural *alle* ‘all’ is often used with a personal pronoun

Sie hat uns **alle** beleidigt
Ich habe mit ihnen **allen** gesprochen
Das ist unser **aller** Hoffnung

She insulted us all
I have spoken to all of them
That is the hope of all of us

alle usually follows the pronoun, but in the nominative it can be separated from it. In this case it has slightly less emphasis. Compare:

Sie **alle** sind gekommen
Sie sind **alle** gekommen

}

They have all come

(e) Uninflected *all* and inflected *alles* are often used with the demonstratives *das* and *dieses*

This corresponds to English ‘all that’ or ‘all this’. Uninflected *all* always precedes the demonstrative, but inflected *alles* may precede or follow the demonstrative, or, with less emphasis, be separated from it:

Ich habe **all das/alles das/das alles** schon gesehen
Das habe ich **alles** schon gesehen

} *I’ve already seen all that*

Ich bin mit **all dem/dem allen/allem dem**
einverstanden

I agree to all that

Mit **all diesem** werde ich nicht fertig

I can’t cope with all this

In the dative singular, when *all-* follows the demonstrative, it can have the ending - *en* as an alternative to - *em*, e.g. *dem/diesem all en* or *dem all em*.

(f) A noun can be qualified by a following inflected *all* -

all- follows the verb if the noun comes before the verb. This usage is most common in the plural:

Die **Kinder** spielen **alle** im Garten

Die **Semmeln** sind **alle** trocken

In the singular this construction is colloquial and restricted to the nominative and accusative singular feminine and neuter:

Das **Brot** ist **alles** trocken

Ich habe **die Milch** **alle** verschüttet

Singular *alles* is often used with a plural noun after the verb *sein* in the sense ‘nothing but’: *Das sind **alles** Lügen.*

(g) The use of *ganz* for English ‘all’

In practice, the adjective *ganz* is often the most idiomatic equivalent of English ‘all’, particularly with singular nouns. Thus, English ‘all my money’ may correspond in German to *mein ganzes Geld* or *all mein Geld*, with the former being rather more frequent. Compare also:

Der **ganze** Wein war schlecht
diese **ganze** Unsicherheit
mit seiner **ganzen** jugendlichen Energie

*All the wine was bad
all this uncertainty
with all his youthful energy*

With collective nouns, time expressions and geographical names *ganz* is often the only possible equivalent for English ‘all’:

Die **ganze** Familie kommt
den **ganzen** Tag (lang)
der **ganze** Januar war kalt
ganz Europa, **ganz** Schweden, **ganz**
München
in der **ganzen** Schweiz

*all (of) the family is/are coming
all day (long)
all January it was cold
all (of) Europe, all (of) Sweden, all (of)
Munich
in all of Switzerland*

The use of *ganz* with a plural noun is colloquial, e.g. *Nach dem Sturm waren die ganzen Fenster kaputt.* In such contexts *sämtliche* (see 5.5.23) is a common alternative in formal registers, e.g. *Nach dem Sturm waren **sämtliche** Fenster* (‘all the windows’) *kaputt.*

(h) Other uses of *all* -

- (i) *alles* can be used to emphasize a large number of people or things with the interrogatives *wer* and *was*, cf. 5.3.3b, e.g. *Wer kommt denn alles? Was hast du dort alles gekauft?*
- (ii) In colloquial North German *alle* is used in the sense of ‘all gone’: *Die Butter ist jetzt alle. Meine Geduld ist alle.*
- (iii) *alle* is compounded with the demonstrative pronoun in the phrases *bei alledem* ‘for all that’, *trotz alledem* ‘in spite of all that’.
- (iv) *alles* occurs frequently with an adjective used as a noun, see 6.2.4b, e.g. *alles Wichtige* ‘all (the) important things’.
- (v) In colloquial speech in the South and West, *all(e)s* (sometimes spelled *als*) is used to express a continuous action (= English ‘to keep on doing sth.’), e.g. *Er hat als geflucht* ‘He kept on cursing’.

5.5.2 *ander* ‘other’

(a) In most contexts *ander* is an adjective

However, it has a few special forms and uses which resemble those of a determiner or pronoun. The following examples illustrate the range of its uses:

der and(e)re Student	<i>the other student</i>
mein anderes Auto	my other car
der and(e)re	the other one
irgendein and(e)rer	some/any other one
die drei anderen	the three others
alle anderen	all the others
andere deutsche Politiker	other German politicians
alles and(e)re	<i>everything else</i>

When *ander* is used without a preceding article or other determiner, a following adjective has the same (‘strong’) endings as those of *ander*, **except that** - *en* is the norm in the **dative singular masculine** and **neuter**:

anderes dumm es Gerede

andere italienisch e Maler

mit anderer modern er Musik

aus anderem wertvoll en Material

(b) Notes on the spelling and forms of *ander*

(i) The first - *e*- is often dropped in writing, e.g. *andre*, *andrer*, *andres*. With the endings - *en* and - *em*, though, it is more usual to drop the second - *e* -, e.g. *ander(e)m*, *ander(e)n* (less common: *andrem*, *andren*).

(ii) When used with a preceding determiner and no following noun, it differs from other adjectives in not normally being spelled with a capital letter: *der and(e)re*, *alles and(e)re*, etc. However, an initial small or capital letter can be used after *etwas* and *nichts*: *etwas and(e)res*/ *And(e)res*, *nichts and(e)res*/*And(e)res*, see also 21.2.1c.

(iii) ‘another cup of tea’ = *noch eine Tasse Tee*

(iv) For the adverb *anders* ‘else’, see 7.4.5.

5.5.3 *beide* ‘both’

(a) *beide* ‘both’ can be used as a determiner or a pronoun

It has the same endings as the plural of *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)), and a following adjective has weak endings:

Ich habe beide Bücher gekauft	<i>I bought both books</i>
Beide Brüder sind gekommen	Both brothers came
beide jungen Mädchen	both young girls
Seine Brüder sind beide gekommen	His brothers both came
Beide sind gekommen	<i>Both came</i>

When used as a pronoun, *beide* can be strengthened by *alle*:

Alle **beide** sind gekommen

The two of them came

(b) *beide* can be used as a simple adjective after a definite article or another determiner

It then has the endings of a ‘weak’ adjective and often corresponds to English ‘two’:

Seine **beiden** Brüder sind gekommen
Die **beiden** Brüder sind gekommen

His two brothers came
The two brothers came

(c) Used with a personal pronoun, *beide* usually has the endings of plural *dieser*

wir **beide**, sie **beide**, von euch **beiden**, unser **beider**

There is some variation in usage with *wir* and *ihr*:

- (i) In isolation *wir beiden* can be used rather than *wir beide*. It is generally less common, but it is usual if a noun follows, e.g. *wir beiden Freunde*.
- (ii) *ihr beiden* is more usual than *ihr beide* in isolation, e.g. *Ihr **beiden**, wollt ihr mitkommen?* Within a clause either is current, e.g. *Wollt ihr **beide(n)** schon mitkommen?*
- (iii) If *beide* is separated from the pronoun, only the ending - *e* is usual:

Wir wollen **beide** schon mitkommen.
Beide halten sie ein Wahlergebnis für
möglich, das eine große Koalition
erzwänge (Zeit)

Ihr wollt **beide** mitkommen, oder?
*They **both** consider an election
result possible which would force a
grand coalition*

(d) The neuter singular *beides* is used collectively to refer to two things

In this usage it can be the equivalent of English ‘either’:

Sie hatte einen Hut und einen Regenschirm mit und ließ beides im Zug liegen	<i>She had a hat and an umbrella with her and left both on the train</i>
Sprechen Sie Deutsch oder Englisch? – Beides	Do you speak German or English? Both
Beides ist möglich	<i>Either is possible</i>

If *beides* is the subject of *sein*, the verb can be singular or plural:

Das Hotel und die Landschaft: beides ist/sind schön	<i>The hotel and the scenery: both are lovely</i>
---	---

The use of singular *beides* to refer to people is a non-standard colloquialism, e.g. *Ich habe mit den Brüdern Schmid zu Mittag gegessen. **Beides** ist/sind* (in writing: *Beide sind*) *Vegetarier*.

(e) Other uses of *beide*, and other equivalents of English ‘both’

Einer von beiden könnte uns helfen	<i>One/Either of the two could help us</i>
An beiden Enden des Ganges hängt ein Bild	At either end of the corridor there is a picture
in beiden Fällen	in either case
Keiner von beiden ist gekommen	Neither of them came
Sowohl seine Frau als (auch) seine Tochter sind krank	<i>Both his wife and his daughter are sick</i>

5.5.4 *einer* ‘one’

(a) The pronoun *einer* declines like the possessive pronoun *meiner*

The forms are given in [Table 5.11](#). Note in particular that the pronoun *einer* has different endings from those of the indefinite article *ein* in the nominative

singular masculine (*ein er*) and the nominative/accusative singular neuter (*ein es*).

[Table 5.11](#) Declension of the pronoun *einer*

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	einer	eine	eines
Accusative	einen	eine	eines
Genitive	eines	einer	eines
Dative	einem	einer	einem

A paraphrase with *von* (see 2.4.2) is often preferred to the genitive forms of *einer* so that, for example, *die Empfehlung von einem* ihrer Freunde is used rather than: *die Empfehlung eines* ihrer Freunde ‘the recommendation of one of her friends’.

eines is often written *eins*, reflecting its usual pronunciation. For the use of *eins* as a numeral ‘one’, see 8.1.2.

(b) The use of the pronoun *einer*

eine r corresponds to English ‘one’ in the sense of ‘one of a certain number’:

einer der Männer, eine der Frauen, ein(e)s der Kinder	<i>one of the men, one of the women, one of the children</i>
Ein Fenster war offen und ein(e)s war zu	One window was open and one was shut
Ich sprach mit einer der Damen	I spoke to one of the ladies
eines der Themen, die der slowenische Außenminister angesprochen hat (<i>Presse</i>)	<i>one of the topics which the Slovenian foreign minister touched on</i>

Unstressed *einer* has the negative *keiner*, see 5.5.16, stressed *einer* has the negative *nicht einer*. Compare: *Ich habe **keinen** gesehen* ‘I haven’t seen one’ and: *Ich habe **nicht einen** gesehen* ‘I haven’t seen a single one’.

(c) *einer* often has the sense of ‘someone’, ‘anyone’

Einer muss es gesehen haben	<i>Someone must have seen it</i>
einer , der sie gekannt hat	a person/someone who knew her
Mit so einem will ich nichts zu tun haben	I don’t want anything to do with anyone like that
Da kam einer durch die Glastür	<i>Someone came through the glass door</i>

This is common in spoken German. It is often equivalent to *jemand*, see 5.5.15, although this more clearly refers to an indefinite ‘somebody’ whose identity is quite unknown. *jemand* is also generally more polite, whereas *einer* can sound offensive, particularly in the feminine, e.g. *Da war gerade **eine** mit sechs Kindern*.

The case forms of *einer* are used for those which *man* lacks (i.e. the accusative and dative, see 5.5.18), but using *einer* for *man* in the nominative (e.g. *Und das soll **einer** wissen!* for: *Und das soll man wissen!*) is colloquial.

(d) *einer* can be used as an adjective

with the definite article, the demonstratives or the possessives. It then has the ‘weak’ adjective endings (see [Table 6.4](#)), but it never has an initial capital letter, even when there is no noun following:

Der eine deutsche Tourist beschwerte sich	<i>One German tourist complained</i>
das eine , das ich brauche	the one thing I need
Mein einer Sohn ist gestorben (<i>coll.</i>)	One of my sons has died
Dieser eine Schnaps wird dich nicht gleich umwerfen	<i>This one schnapps won’t knock you out</i>

der eine linked to a following *der andere* corresponds to English ‘(the) one.. . the other’, etc. In German, though, the definite article is usually present, whereas it can be lacking in English, and the plural *die einen* can occur in the meaning ‘some’:

Das **eine** Buch habe ich gelesen, **das**
andere aber noch nicht
Die **einen** sangen, **die anderen** spielten

*I've read one of the books, but not
the other one yet
Some were singing, others were
playing*

(e) Some idiomatic uses of *einer*

Das ist aber **einer** !
Du bist mir **einer** ! (see 2.5.2d)
Eins wollte ich noch sagen
Trinken wir noch **eins** ?
Es ist mir alles **eins**
Er redet **in einem** fort

*He's quite a lad
You're a nice one!
There's one more thing I wanted to say
Shall we have another (drink)?
It's all the same to me
He talks without stopping*

5.5.5 *ein wenig, ein bisschen* 'a little'

(a) *ein wenig* corresponds to English 'a little'

The *ein* does not decline. A phrase with *von* (see 2.4) is used rather than a genitive:

Ich hatte noch **ein wenig** britisches Geld
Der Zug hatte sich **ein wenig** verspätet
Der Saal war **ein wenig** ruhiger
geworden
mit **ein wenig** männlicher Eitelkeit

*I still had a little British money
The train had got a little late
The room had become a little more
quiet
with a little male vanity*

(b) *ein bisschen* can replace *ein wenig* in most contexts

It could be used in all the examples in (a) without any significant difference in meaning, but it is usually felt to sound more colloquial. Unlike *ein wenig*, it can, optionally, be declined in the dative singular, e.g. *mit ein(em) bisschen Geld*. This

is normal when it is used as a pronoun, e.g. *Mit **einem** bisschen wäre ich schon zufriede n*. It also differs from *ein wenig* in that it can occur with a preceding adjective:

ein winziges bisschen Käse	<i>a tiny little bit of cheese</i>
mit einem ganz kleinen bisschen gesunden Verstand	<i>with a very little bit of common sense</i>

In South Germany *ein bisse(r)l* is a frequent variant in speech for northern *ein bisschen*.

(c) *bisschen* can also be used with a demonstrative, a possessive or *kein*

mit dem bisschen Verstand, den er hat	<i>with the little sense that he has</i>
mit ihrem bisschen Talent	<i>with her bit of talent</i>
Er hat kein bisschen Humor	<i>He hasn't got the least sense of humour</i>

5.5.6 *ein paar* 'a few'

The *ein* of *ein paar* does not decline. A phrase with *von* (see 2.4) is used rather than a following genitive. The phrase *ein paar* is close in meaning to *einige*, see 5.5.7, but it sounds more colloquial:

Ein paar Flaschen Wein haben wir noch im Keller	<i>We've still got a few bottles of wine in the cellar</i>
Willst du ein paar haben?	<i>Do you want a few?</i>
mit der Hilfe von ein paar alten Freunden	<i>with the help of a few old friends</i>

The *ein* can be replaced by another determiner, which is declined. Such combinations can sound disparaging or pejorative:

Was soll ich mit den paar Euros	<i>What am I supposed to do with these few</i>
--	--

anfangen?
der Wert meiner **paar** Möbel
Die Straßenbahn kommt alle **paar**
Minuten

lousy euros?
the value of my few bits of furniture
The tram comes every few minutes

ein paar should not be confused with *ein Paar* ‘a pair’. Compare *ein paar Schuhe* ‘a few shoes’ but *ein Paar Schuhe* ‘a pair of shoes’.

5.5.7 *einiger, einige* ‘some’

einig - refers to a limited amount or number. It corresponds to English unstressed ‘some’ (or ‘a few’, as it is close in meaning to *ein paar*, see 5.5.6). It declines like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)) except that the genitive singular masculine and neuter form (which is little used) is *einig en*, and a following adjective in the plural usually has **strong** endings, see 6.1.4.

(a) The use of *einiger* in the singular is limited

The usual German equivalents of English unstressed *some* in the singular are *etwas* (see 5.5.9), or, most commonly, simply no article or determiner at all (see 4.8.3), e.g. *Ich habe heute (etwas) Fleisch gekauft* ‘I bought some meat today’.

When *einiger* is used in the singular it implies a rather unusual or unexpected quantity and often comes close to English ‘no little’. It is most frequent with mass and abstract nouns (especially *Entfernung* and *Zeit*), adjectives used as nouns and collectives:

mit **einigem** Glück
bei **einigem** guten Willen
vor ihm in **einiger** Entfernung
vor **einiger** Zeit schon
nach **einigem** Überlegen
Diese Schlangen, die ihr Gift spucken, zielen
bis drei Meter weit noch mit **einiger**

with some degree of luck
with a certain degree of good will
some distance in front of him
some time ago now
after some consideration
These snakes which spit their
venom can aim up to three metres

Treffsicherheit (*Grzimek*)

with no little accuracy

In the singular *einiger* is mainly used as a determiner rather than as a pronoun, but the neuter singular *einiges* does occur as a collective indefinite pronoun:

einiges davon

some of it

Ich habe noch **einiges** zu tun

I've still got a few things to do

(b) In the plural *einige* is widely used both as a determiner and as a pronoun

Sie wollte **einige** Ansichtskarten von
Rothenburg kaufen

*She wanted to buy some postcards of
Rothenburg*

In der Stadt gibt es **einige** Friseure
unter Verwendung **einiger** technischer
Mittel

There are a few hairdressers in the
town
by using some technical methods

Einige mussten stehen

Some/A few had to stand

Sie hat schon **einige** mitgebracht

She's already brought some/a few

German often uses no determiner in contexts where English uses unstressed 'some' to refer to a number of things. Thus, a common alternative to the first example above would be: *Sie wollte Ansichtskarten von Rothenburg kaufen.*

einige is also often used with numerals to mean 'a few', e.g. ***einige* tausend Bücher** 'a few thousand books'.

5.5.8 *etliche* 'some'

etliche is similar in meaning to *einige*. However, it typically implies 'more than the expected number' and it is quite widely used in this sense in both spoken and written German. In this way, it approaches English 'several' or 'a fair number of'. It declines like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)) and it is almost only used in the plural, as a determiner (much less commonly as a pronoun). A following adjective usually has **strong** endings, see 6.1.4.

Warum ist die Bahn so unpünktlich geworden? Da gibt es **etliche** Ursachen (*Spiegel*)
Etliche dieser Stücke sind auch für Anfänger relativ leicht zu bewältigen (*SWF*)

Why have the railways become so unpunctual? There are several/a (good) number of reasons for this
Some/A number of these pieces are relatively easy to manage, even for a beginner

In Switzerland *etwelche* is used with the same meaning as *etliche*, e.g. *Den FC Flawil plagen vor dem morgigen Spiel zwar etwelche Personalsorgen* (SGT).

5.5.9 *etwas* ‘something’, ‘anything’

etwas is used as an **indefinite pronoun**, to **qualify nouns**, and as an **adverb**. It has no case forms and is not used in genitive constructions, a phrase with *von* (see 2.4) being used if necessary.

(a) As an indefinite pronoun, *etwas* corresponds to English ‘something’ or ‘anything’

Etwas störte mich
 Ich habe **etwas** für Sie
 Hast du **etwas** gesagt?

Something bothered me
 I’ve got something for you
 Did you say anything?

In this use, *etwas* is commonly reduced to *was* in colloquial speech unless it occupies first position in the sentence, e.g. *Ich habe was für Si e; Hast du was gesagt?* *etwas* is often used with *von* in a partitive sense, i.e. ‘some (of)’:

Ich möchte **etwas** von diesem Kuchen

I would like some of this cake

In contexts like this, *etwas* can be omitted: *Ich möchte von diesem Kuchen.*

(b) Qualifying a noun, *etwas* has the sense of ‘some’, ‘any’ or ‘a

little'

It is used chiefly with mass and abstract nouns in the singular. However, as an equivalent to unstressed English 'some' or 'any', German often uses no determiner at all (see 4.2.2a, 4.8.3 and 5.5.7b), and *etwas* could be omitted in all the examples below:

Ich brauche etwas frisches Fleisch	<i>I need some fresh meat</i>
Er hat kaum etwas Geld	He has hardly any money
Bringen Sie mir bitte etwas Brot	Please bring me some bread
Sie muss etwas Geduld haben	She needs a little patience
Etwas mehr Aufmerksamkeit wäre nützlich gewesen	<i>A little more attention would have been useful</i>

etwas is commonly used with a following adjective used as a noun (see 6.2.4b). The adjective has the 'strong' adjective endings:

etwas ganz Neu es	<i>something quite new</i>
Er hat von etwas ganz Neu em gesprochen	<i>He spoke of something quite new</i>

(c) As an adverb, *etwas* means 'somewhat', 'a bit'

Er ist etwas nervös	<i>He is somewhat/rather/a bit nervous</i>
Es geht ihm etwas besser	He is somewhat/a bit better
Er zögerte etwas	<i>He hesitated somewhat/a bit</i>

5.5.10 *folgend* '(the) following'

folgend can be used as a simple adjective, but it has some special forms and uses which resemble those of a determiner or pronoun. Unlike English 'following', it is often used without a preceding article or other determiner. In these contexts a following adjective usually has 'weak' endings in the singular and 'strong' endings in the plural, see 6.1.4:

alle folgenden Bemerkungen	
Sie machte folgende Bemerkungen	<i>all the following remarks</i>
Sie machte folgende treffende Bemerkungen	She made the following remarks
folgender interessante Gedanke	She made the following apposite remarks
mit folgender nachdrücklichen Warnung	the following interesting thought
Sie sagte mir Folgendes : ...	with the following firm warning
Im Folgenden wird diese Frage näher erläutert	She said the following to me: ...
Aus Folgendem lässt sich schließen, dass...	In the following this question will be clarified more precisely
	<i>From the following it may be deduced that ...</i>

When *folgend* is used as a pronoun meaning ‘the following’, as in the last three examples, it has an initial capital letter.

5.5.11 *irgend* ‘some ... or other’

(a) The principal use of *irgend* is to emphasize indefiniteness

It occurs in combination with many indefinite pronouns, adverbs and determiners, giving them the sense of ‘some ... or other’ or ‘any ... at all’. All these compounds of *irgend* are now written as single words, e.g. *irgendetwas*, *irgendjemand*, *irgendwo*.

(b) *irgend* can be compounded with most interrogative adverbs to form indefinite adverbs

(see 7.6 for the basic forms of these interrogative adverbs):

irgendwann ‘sometime or other’, ‘any time’; *irgendwie* ‘somehow’, ‘anyhow’;
irgendwo ‘somewhere’, ‘anywhere’; *irgendwohin* ‘(to) somewhere, anywhere’;
irgendwoher ‘from somewhere, anywhere’:

Du musst es irgendwie machen	<i>You'll have to do it somehow</i>
Er fährt heute Nachmittag irgendwohin	He's going somewhere this afternoon
Gehst du heute Abend irgendwohin ?	<i>Are you going anywhere tonight?</i>

(c) With *einer*, (*et*) *was*, *jemand* and *wer*, *irgend* stresses indefiniteness

irgendeiner, *irgendjemand* and *irgendwer* correspond to English 'somebody', 'anybody', *irgendetwas* to 'something', 'anything'. In practice, *irgendeiner* and *irgendwer* are commoner than simple *einer* and *wer* (see 5.5.4 and 5.5.27) to mean 'somebody', 'anybody':

Irgendwann wurden von irgendwem diese Briefe aus dem Kasten genommen (<i>Böll</i>)	<i>At some time or other someone (or other) took these letters out of the letter-box</i>
Versteht er irgendetwas von Wein?	Does he know anything (at all) about wine?
Irgendeiner soll es gesagt haben	Someone (or other) is supposed to have said it
Hat denn irgendjemand angerufen?	<i>Did anybody phone?</i>

Note that only *irgendjemand* and *irgendetwas*, not simple *jemand* or *etwas*, are possible in response to a question:

Wer hat eben geklopft? Irgendjemand	<i>Who just knocked? Someone or other</i>
Was willst du denn kaufen? Irgendetwas	<i>What are you going to buy, then? Something or other</i>

In colloquial North German, *irgend* can be compounded with the prepositional adverb with *wo* (*r*)- (see 5.3.3c), in place of *irgendetwas* with a preposition:

Ich habe mich irgendworan gestoßen (standard: an <i>irgendetwas</i>)	<i>I knocked against something or other</i>
---	---

(d) irgendein(er) and irgendwelcher

These correspond to ‘some (or other), any (whatsoever)’, often with the sense of ‘no matter which/who’. They are used as determiners or pronouns.

- (i) The determiner *irgendein* has the endings of the indefinite article *ein*, see [Table 4.3](#). It is used in the singular with countable nouns:

Er zeigte mir irgendeine Broschüre Hat er irgendeine Bemerkung gemacht? Die Selbstmordquote soll höher sein als in irgendeinem anderen Ort der Welt (Bednarz)	<i>He showed me some brochure or other Did he make any remark (at all)? The suicide rate is supposed to be higher than in any other place in the world</i>
--	--

- (ii) The pronoun *irgendeiner*, which declines like *einer* (see [Table 5.11](#)) only has singular forms and can only refer to countable nouns. The masculine and feminine forms are used in the sense of ‘somebody’, ‘anybody’:

Irgendeiner muss dich gesehen haben Wenn du wirklich einen neuen Tisch suchst, musst du hier im Geschäft irgendeinen gesehen haben, der dir gefällt Ich habe ein paar Bücher über Israel. Sie können sich irgendeins ausleihen	<i>Someone or other must have seen you If you’re really looking for a new table, you must have seen one here in the shop which you like I’ve got a few books about Israel. You can borrow any one you like</i>
---	--

- (iii) *irgendwelcher*, which declines like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)), is used as a determiner in the singular with mass and abstract nouns, and in the plural. A following adjective in the plural most often has weak endings, see 6.1.4. The genitive is rarely used in the singular:

Wenn irgendwelche anderen Idioten auf RTL heiraten wollen, ... (HMP)	<i>If any other idiots want to get married on RTL ...</i>
Er hat irgendwelches dumme(s) Zeug geredet	<i>He was talking some stupid rubbish or other</i>

Wenn Sie irgendwelche Probleme haben, wenden Sie sich an uns (<i>Bednarz</i>)	<i>If you have any problems (at all), turn to us</i>
---	--

Colloquially, *irgendwelcher* is often used for *irgendein*, e.g. *Er zeigte mir irgendwelche Broschüre.*

(e) *irgend so ein* corresponds to English ‘one/some of those’, ‘any/some such’

In the plural, *irgend solche* is used. It can often sound pejorative:

Wer war es? Es war irgend so ein Vertreter für Doppelfenster Er machte irgend solche komische Bemerkungen	<i>Who was it? It was one of those men who sell double glazing He made some such odd remarks</i>
--	--

(f) *irgend* can be used as an independent adverb with the sense of *irgendwie*

i.e. ‘somehow’, ‘anyhow’, ‘in some way’:

wenn irgend möglich Ich würde mich freuen, wenn es irgend geht	<i>if at all possible I would be pleased if it's possible somehow</i>
--	---

5.5.12 *jeder* ‘each’, ‘every’

(a) *jeder* is only used in the singular, as a determiner or a pronoun

When used as a determiner, *jeder* corresponds to English ‘each’, ‘every’, when used as a pronoun to English ‘everyone’, ‘everybody’. It declines like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)), except that *jeden* (rather than *jedes*) is usual in the genitive singular

masculine and neuter if the following noun has the ending *-(e)s*, e.g. *am Ende jeden* (less frequent: *jed es*) *Abschnitts*. It is not used in the genitive as a pronoun.

Sie hat **jedem** Kind einen Apfel
gegeben
nach **jedem** solchen Versuch
Er kam **jeden** Tag zur selben Zeit
In diesem kleinen Ort kennt **jeder**
jeden

*She gave each child an apple
after each such attempt
He came every day at the same time
In this little place everyone knows
everybody else*

jeder often has an individualizing sense (i.e. ‘no matter which/who’), in which case it can be the equivalent of English ‘any’:

Das weiß doch **jeder** gebildete Bürger
Die industrielle Revolution verwandelte die
Lebensbedingungen der Menschen radikaler
als **jeder** andere Ereigniszusammenhang der
neueren Geschichte

*Any/Every educated citizen knows
that, though
The Industrial Revolution changed
people’s living conditions more
radically than any other set of
events in recent history*

The neuter *jedes* can refer back to both sexes: *Seine Eltern waren sehr tüchtig, jedes auf seine Weise*. See also section 1.1.12b.

(b) The combination *ein jeder* is more emphatic than *jeder*

It is used chiefly as a pronoun and is particularly frequent in the individualizing sense of stressed ‘any’, i.e. ‘no matter which/who’. In this combination, *jeder* has the same endings as a simple adjective:

Ein jeder wollte was sagen
Das könnte doch **ein jeder** machen
Das kannst du doch nicht **einem**
jeden erzählen
Die Wünsche **eines jeden** werden
berücksichtigt

*Everyone wanted to say something
But everybody/anybody (at all) could do
that
But you can’t tell that to just anybody
The wishes of every individual are taken
into account*

5.5.13 *jedermann* ‘everybody’, ‘everyone’

jedermann is only used, as a pronoun, in elevated, formal registers and set phrases. Its meaning is the same as that of *jeder*, which is much more commonly used. Its only case form is the genitive *jedermanns*.

Jedermann wusste, dass Michael den Wehrdienst verweigert hatte Das ist nicht jedermanns Sache	<i>Everyone knew that Michael had refused to do military service That's not everyone's cup of tea</i>
---	---

5.5.14 *jedweder, jeglicher* ‘each’, ‘every’

jedweder and *jeglicher* decline like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)). They are used as determiners or pronouns as alternatives to *jeder* and both are largely restricted to formal written registers.

(a) *jedweder* is rather more emphatic than *jeder*

It has a rather old-fashioned ring and is used sparingly, even in formal registers:

Auch sonst bleiben den Insassen jedwede Motorgeräusche verborgen (HMP)	<i>Otherwise, too, the occupants are cut off from any sort of noise from the motor</i>
---	--

(b) *jeglicher* stresses the individuality of the items in question

It is most often used in the sense of stressed ‘any’ (i.e. ‘no matter who/what’). It is most frequent nowadays with abstract nouns and in negative contexts. Unlike *jeder*, it can also be used in the plural. Adjectives following *jeglicher* have the strong declension, see 6.1.4:

Das entbehrt jeglicher Grundlage Gorbatschow lehnte jegliche Änderung	<i>That is completely unfounded Gorbachov turned down any</i>
--	---

der Grenzziehungen in der Sowjetunion ab (FR)	alteration of the frontiers in the Soviet Union
Es fehlt derzeit jeglicher Ansatz für eine Besserung am Arbeitsmarkt (MM)	<i>At the moment we are lacking any sign of an improvement in the labour market</i>

5.5.15 *jemand* ‘somebody’, ‘someone’; *niemand* ‘nobody’, ‘no-one’

(a) Declension and use of *jemand* and *niemand*

(i) *jemand* ‘somebody’, ‘someone’ and *niemand* ‘nobody’, ‘no-one’ have endings to show case as given in [Table 5.12](#).

[Table 5.12](#) Declension of *jemand* and *niemand*

Nominative	jemand	niemand
Accusative	jemand(en)	niemand(en)
Genitive	jemandes	niemandes
Dative	jemand(em)	niemand(em)

In the accusative and dative, the forms without endings are at least as common as the forms with endings in both speech and writing:

Ich habe **niemand** / **niemanden** gesehen

Ich habe **jemand** / **jemandem** das Paket gegeben

(ii) The genitive forms are felt to be awkward and tend to be avoided by paraphrasing, e.g. *Hat jemand diese Aktentasche liegen lassen?* or *Wem gehört diese Aktentasche?* rather than: *Ist das jemandes Aktentasche?*

(iii) Pronouns and determiners referring back to *jemand* and *niemand* have the masculine singular form: *Niemand, **der** es weiß; Jemand hat **seine** Tasche vergessen*

(iv) In colloquial speech, *einer* and *wer* are common alternatives to *jemand*, see 5.5.4 and 5.5.27, as is *keiner* for *niemand*, see 5.5.16.

(v) The indefiniteness of *jemand* may be emphasized by combining it with *irgend*, see 5.5.11c.

(b) *jemand* and *niemand* with a following adjective

When followed by an adjective, *jemand* and *niemand* are usually endingless in the accusative and dative. The adjective is treated as a noun (see 6.2), and it can have the ending - *es* in all cases, although it is now more usual for it to have the endings - *en* in the accusative and - *em* in the dative cases.

Jemand Fremd **es** ist gekommen

Ich habe jemand Fremd **en** gesehen (less often: *jemand Fremd es*)

Ich habe mit jemand Fremd **em** gesprochen (less often: *jemand Fremd es*)

The use of the ending - *er* in the nominative case, e.g. *jemand Fremd er*, is a South German regionalism.

jemand and *niemand* can be used in a similar way with *ander*, which always has a small initial letter in all these forms:

Jemand ander **s** ist gekommen

Ich habe jemand ander **s** /ander **en** gesehen

Ich habe mit jemand ander **s** /ander **em** gesprochen

With *anders* the ending - *s* in all cases is the more frequent alternative, and the endings - *en* and -*em* are typical of South German usage.

5.5.16 *kein*, *keiner* ‘no’, ‘not ... any’, ‘none’

(a) *kein* is the negative form of the indefinite article

See 4.1.2c. Its basic declension is identical to *ein*, but it does have plural forms, as

illustrated in [Table 4.4](#). It is used typically where a corresponding positive sentence would have an indefinite article or no article, and it thus usually corresponds to English ‘not a’, ‘not ... any’ or ‘no’:

Sie hat ein Auto	Sie hat kein Auto
Wir haben frische Brötchen	Wir haben keine frischen Brötchen
Ich habe Zeit	Ich habe keine Zeit

(b) *kein* or *nicht* in negation?

It sometimes seems difficult to know whether to use *kein* or *nicht* in negation. In general, *kein* is used to negate an indefinite noun (i.e. one with an indefinite article or no article), as in the examples given under (a) above. *nicht* is used in other cases, notably to negate a whole sentence, e.g. *Sie will heute mitkommen* – *Sie will heute **nicht** mitkommen*. However, there are contexts where the choice is not completely obvious:

- (i) German phrases with an indefinite noun (and thus negated with *kein*) which have rather different English equivalents:

Ich bin Deutscher	Ich bin kein Deutscher
Ich spreche Deutsch	Ich spreche kein Deutsch
ein Problem von großer Bedeutung	ein Problem von keiner großen Bedeutung

- (ii) Phrasal verbs with nouns, e.g. *Atem holen*, *sich Mühe geben*, *Freude empfinden* and all those with *haben*, e.g. *Angst*, *Durst*, *Hunger haben*, etc. are generally negated with *kein*:

Er hat sich **keine** Mühe gegeben

Dabei hat er **keine** Freude empfunden

Ich habe **keinen** Durst, Hunger

Sie hatten **keine** Angst

Phrasal verbs with *nehmen* have *kein* **or** *nicht*:

Er hat **keine** / **nicht** Rücksicht auf mich genommen

Sie wollen **keine** / **nicht** Rache nehmen

Sie hat **keinen** / **nicht** Abschied von ihm genommen

nicht occurs with phrasal verbs where the noun is so closely linked to the verb that it is felt to be the equivalent of a separable prefix:

Er spielt **nicht** Klavier

Sie läuft **nicht** Schi

Sie haben in Berlin **nicht** Wurzel gefasst

Er hat **nicht** Wort gehalten

Er kann **nicht** Auto fahren

(c) *kein* and *nicht ein*

kein is the usual equivalent of English ‘not a’ (and using *nicht ein* for *kein* is typical of English learners’ German). Nevertheless, there are a few contexts where *nicht ein* is used:

(i) if *ein* is stressed, i.e. ‘not (a single) one’:

Die TAP besitzt **nicht ein** Flugzeug, denn
alle 38 Maschinen sind geleast (NZZ)

*TAP doesn't own a single
aeroplane, as all 38 planes are
leased*

(ii) in direct contrasts:

Das ist eine Ulme, **nicht eine** Eiche

That's an elm, not an oak

(iii) *nicht ein* is more usual than *kein* after *wenn* ‘if’:

Man hätte ihn kaum bemerkt, wenn *No-one would have noticed him, if a*

ihm **nicht ein** Schnurrbart etwas
Distinguiertes verliehen hätte

*moustache hadn't given him a
rather distinguished air*

(d) Some idiomatic uses of *kein* as a determiner

Sie ist noch **keine** zehn Jahre alt
keine zwei Stunden vor meiner Abreise
Es ist noch **keine** fünf Minuten her
Sie ist schließlich **kein** Kind mehr

*She's not yet ten years old
within two hours of my departure
It is less than five minutes ago
After all, she's no longer a child*

(e) The form *keiner* is used as a pronoun

(i) It has endings like those of *einer*, see [Table 5.11](#). It is rarely used in the genitive:

Keiner von uns hat es gewusst

Zum Schluss hat sie **kein** (e) s der Bücher gekauft

Haben Sie einen Smart-TV? Nein, wir haben **keinen**

In **keinem** dieser neuen Häuser möchte ich wohnen

kein (e) s von beiden *neither of them*

(ii) The neuter form *kein(e)s* is used to refer to people of different sex (see 1.1.12b): *Ich fragte meine Eltern, aber **keins** (von beiden) wusste es.*

(iii) The use of *keiner* for *niemand* to mean 'no-one', 'nobody' (see 5.5.15a) is frequent in colloquial speech but generally avoided in more formal registers.

5.5.17 *lauter* 'only', 'nothing but'

lauter is indeclinable. It is used only as a determiner, i.e. before nouns:

Dort lag lauter Eis und Schnee	<i>Nothing but ice and snow lay there</i>
Es sind lauter junge Leute gekommen	Only young people came
Er hat lauter solchen Unsinn geredet	<i>He only talked rubbish like that</i>

5.5.18 *man* ‘one’

(a) The indefinite pronoun *man* corresponds to English ‘one’

However, unlike ‘one’, it is not restricted to elevated registers. Rather, it corresponds to the general use of ‘you’ in spoken English, or, frequently, to ‘we’, ‘they’ or ‘people’ (and overusing *Leute* in contexts where *man* would be appropriate is typical of English learners’ German). It is also often used in contexts where English would most naturally use a passive construction, e.g. *Man sagt* ‘It is said’, see 13.4.1. The corresponding pronouns are possessive *sein* and reflexive *sich*:

Als man sich zum Abendessen setzte, fehlte der alte Herr	<i>When they/we sat down to dinner the old gentleman was missing</i>
Man hat sich nach dir erkundigt	People were asking after you
Man sollte seinen Freunden helfen	One ought to help one’s friends
Hier spricht man meistens unter sich noch Dialekt	<i>Here people mainly still speak dialect amongst themselves</i>

man is sometimes used, for reasons of politeness, to refer to the speaker, e.g. *Darf **man** fragen, wohin Sie fahren?* In certain situations this can acquire a note of sarcasm. This is always so when it is used to refer to the listener, e.g. *Hat **man** schon wieder zu tief ins Glas geguckt?*

English-speaking learners should note that *man* is **never** referred back to with *er*, e.g. *Wenn man müde ist, muss **man** (not er) sich setzen.*

(b) *man* only has a nominative case form

In the accusative and dative *einen* and *einem* (see 5.5.4) are used:

Man weiß nie, ob er einen erkannt hat	<i>You never know whether he has recognized you</i>
So Leid es einem tut, man muss manchmal hart sein	<i>However much you regret it, you have to be hard sometimes</i>

The use of the nominative form *einer* for *man* (see 5.5.4) is frequent in colloquial speech, but generally avoided in writing.

5.5.19 *manch* ‘some’, ‘many a’

manch always has the rather special sense of stressed ‘some’, i.e. ‘a fair number, but by no means all’. This may be equivalent to English ‘many a’, and in certain contexts it comes close to the sense of English ‘several’. *manch* has a number of alternative forms.

(a) As a determiner, *manch* is most often used in the inflected form *mancher*

i.e. with the endings of *dieser*, see [Table 5.2](#).

In the genitive singular masculine and neuter, the form *manchen* is occasionally found besides the more frequent *manches* if the following noun has the ending -(e)s (e.g. *manch es Mannes* or *manch en Mannes*).

mancher can be used in the singular or the plural. The singular form (like English ‘many a’) may put more emphasis on the individual items, whereas the plural (like English stressed ‘some’) stresses the collectivity. In practice, however, the difference between, for example, *mancher schöne Tag* and *manche schöne Tage* is slight. A following adjective usually has **strong** endings, see 6.1.4.

An **manchen** Tagen blieb er lange im Bett
 Von der Abzocke **mancher** Skiregionen ist
 hier keine Spur (*HMP*)
 ein überhöhter Preis, wie er in **manchen**
 Reparaturwerkstätten seit Jahren üblich ist
 (*BILD*)

*Some days he stayed in bed a long
 time*

Here there is no sign of the rip-off
 you get in a good number of skiing
 areas

*an exorbitant price, such as has
 been usual in some garages for
 years*

(b) Uninflected *manch* is commonly used as a determiner in the following constructions

(i) before the indefinite article *ein*. This is a less common alternative to inflected *manch*, and it is mainly used in formal writing. The noun is given rather more emphasis:

Da gibt es mancherlei Grund zum
 Zweifeln – **manch ein** Zeitgenosse wird
 sagen: zum Verzweifeln (*Zeit*)

*There are many kinds of reasons
 for doubt – many contemporaries
 will say: for despair*

(ii) before an adjective, where the uninflected form is a widespread and frequent alternative to the inflected one, especially in the singular:

Sie konnten dem Kanzler **manch**
 guten Tipp geben (*MM*)
 ...um neben **manch** Komischem auch
 etliches Entlarvende bieten zu können
 (*MM*)

*They were able to give the
 Chancellor many a good tip
 ...to be able to present quite a few
 revealing things besides much that is
 comical*

(iii) before neuter nouns. This alternative sounds rather old-fashioned, but it has become fashionable again recently:

Und so ist **manch** Dachstubentalent ins
 Scheinwerferlicht geraten (*NUZ*)

*In this way many a hidden talent
 has emerged into the limelight*

(c) As a pronoun *mancher* declines like *dieser*

See [Table 5.2](#). It is not used in the genitive:

Mancher hat es nicht geglaubt Das ist schon manchem passiert Manche trinken Tee, andere lieber Kaffee manche meiner Bekannten	<i>Not many believed it</i> That has happened to quite a few people Some people drink tea, others prefer coffee <i>a fair number of my acquaintances</i>
---	--

manch einer is a fairly frequent alternative to inflected *mancher*:

Manch einer musste auf die Mittagspause verzichten (MM)	<i>A fair few had to give up their lunch hour</i>
---	---

5.5.20 *mehrere* ‘several’

mehrere is used, as a determiner or a pronoun, in the plural only. It has the same endings as *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)). A following adjective usually has strong endings, see 6.1.4.

Ich habe mehrere Bücher darüber gelesen Mehrere standen draußen und warteten Es ist doch viel spannender, mit mehreren Jungen auszugehen, als immer an einem zu kleben (BILD)	<i>I have read several books about it</i> Several people were standing outside waiting <i>But it's much more exciting to go out with several boys than always to stick with one</i>
--	--

5.5.21 *meinesgleichen* ‘people like me’

meinesgleichen is indeclinable. Parallel forms can be formed for the other persons, i.e. *deinesgleichen*, *seinesgleichen*, *ihresgleichen*, *unsresgleichen*, *euresgleichen*. If they are used as the subject of a verb, it has the endings of the third person singular. These forms sometimes sound rather old-fashioned, but the

first example below is a frequent idiom:

Dieser Wagen hat nicht seinesgleichen	<i>This car has no equal</i>
Ich und meinesgleichen interessieren uns	I and people like me aren't interested
für so etwas nicht	in things like that
Euresgleichen hat es wirklich leicht	<i>People like you really have it easy</i>

5.5.22 *nichts* 'nothing', 'not ... anything'

In speech *nichts* is almost invariably pronounced *nix*. It does not decline:

Aus nichts wird nichts (<i>Proverb</i>)	<i>Nothing comes of nothing</i>
Nichts gefiel ihr dort	She didn't like anything there
nichts als Schwierigkeiten	<i>nothing but difficulties</i>

nichts is often used with a following adjective used as a noun, which has the strong endings, see 6.2.4b:

nichts Neues	<i>nothing new</i>
Er hat von nichts Neuem gesprochen	<i>He didn't speak of anything new</i>

It is also common with *von* in partitive constructions, i.e. 'nothing (of)':

Ich möchte nichts von dem Essen	<i>I don't want any of the food</i>
nichts von alledem	<i>nothing of all that</i>

5.5.23 *sämtlich* 'all (the)'

sämtliche inflects like *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)). It is used, as a determiner or a pronoun, in the plural only, as an emphatic alternative to *alle*. A following adjective has weak endings, see 6.1.4.

Sämtliche gezeigten Tiere wurden am Freitag von Experten bewertet (SGT)	<i>All the exhibited animals were judged on Friday by experts</i>
---	---

die Anschriften sämtlicher neuen Mitglieder	<i>the addresses of all the new members</i>
--	---

sämtliche is rather more limited in meaning than *alle*, since it can refer to all the members of a subgroup of persons or things, but not to all those which are in existence. Thus, one can say *Sämtliche* (or *Alle*) *Bäume in dem Wald wurden gefällt*, but only: *Alle* (not *Sämtliche*) *Menschen sind sterblich*.

sämtliche can also be used with a preceding definite article or other determiner, in which case it has the endings of an adjective:

Meine sämtlichen Verwandten haben mir geschrieben	<i>All my relatives wrote to me</i>
--	-------------------------------------

As an adverb, *sämtlich* is used in the meaning ‘without exception’:

Sämtlich waren sie dem Staat eigen (<i>Johnson</i>)	<i>They all belonged to the state</i>
--	---------------------------------------

5.5.24 *unsereiner* ‘someone like me’, ‘the likes of us’

unsereiner declines like *einer*, see [Table 5.10](#). There are parallel forms for the other plural persons, i.e. *eurereiner*, *ihrereiner*, although these are less frequent in practice:

Unsereiner kann das nicht wissen	<i>Someone like me can't know that</i>
Mit unsereinem spricht sie nie	<i>She doesn't talk to the likes of us</i>

In the nominative and accusative, the neuter form *unsereins* is a common alternative to the masculine, especially in colloquial speech.

5.5.25 *viel* ‘much’, *viele* ‘many’, *wenig* ‘a little’, *wenige* ‘a few’

The various forms and uses of *viel* ‘much’, ‘many’, ‘a lot of’ and *wenig* ‘(a) little’, ‘(a) few’, ‘not many’ are broadly similar. Both occur as a determiner, a pronoun,

or an adverb. Both have alternative uninflected and inflected forms, in the latter case with the endings of *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)). In certain constructions and uses the uninflected forms are more usual, in others the inflected, without any identifiable difference in meaning. Adjectives following inflected *viele* and *wenige* in the plural usually have strong endings, see 6.1.4.

ein wenig ‘a little’ is invariable, see 5.5.5.

For the comparatives of *viel* and *wenig*, see 7.7.1b.

(a) *viel* and *wenig* used as pronouns

When *viel* and *wenig* are used as **pronouns**, they most often have **no endings in the singular**, but they do have **an ending in the plural**. They are not used in the genitive singular:

Sie hat **viel** / **wenig** versucht

Er will **viel** / **wenig** haben

Viel / **Wenig** von dem Kuchen

Sie hat **viel** / **wenig** verraten

Ich bin mit **viel** / **wenig** von dem einverstanden, was du sagst

Viele / **Wenige** von diesen Büchern

Ich habe **viele** / **wenige** gesehen

The inflected neuter singular forms, i.e. **vieles** (nominative or accusative), **vielem** (dative) are occasionally used, chiefly in formal writing:

Sie hat **vieles** versucht

Mit **vielem** bin ich nicht einverstanden

She has tried a lot of things

There's much I don't agree with

Inflected forms of *wenig* (i.e. *weniges*, *wenigem*) are rare.

(b) *viel* and *wenig* used as determiners

When *viel* and *wenig* are used as **determiners**, they usually have **no endings in the singular**, but they do have **endings in the plural**. The genitive singular is scarcely ever used, a phrase with *von* being preferred (see 2.4):

Dazu ist viel Mut nötig	<i>Much courage is needed for that</i>
Ich trinke wenig Milch	I don't drink much milk
Er handelte mit viel Geschick	He acted with a lot of skill
Sie ist mit wenig Geld ausgekommen	She managed with little money
die Wirkung von wenig Wein	the effect of not much wine
der Genuss von viel Obst	eating a lot of fruit
Viele Probleme wurden besprochen	Many problems were discussed
Gestern waren wenige Zuschauer im Stadion	There weren't many spectators at the ground yesterday
Er hat viele / wenige Freunde	He has a lot of/few friends
die Reden vieler Politiker	the speeches of a lot of politicians
mit vielen / wenigen Ausnahmen	<i>with a lot of/few exceptions</i>

There are some common exceptions to this usage:

- (i) Inflected singular forms are sometimes used in formal registers with a following adjective used as a noun (see 6.2.4b), e.g. *Er hat **vieles** / **weniges** Interessante gesagt* (less formal: *Er hat **viel** / **wenig** Interessantes gesagt*).
- (ii) Inflected forms are quite common in the dative singular masculine and neuter, e.g. *Mit **viel** / **vielem** Zureden konnten wir einiges erreichen*.
- (iii) Endings are optional with plural *viel* when it is used with *wie* in questions in the meaning 'how many': *Wissen Sie, **wie viel(e)** Stunden Arbeitslose arbeiten dürfen*.
- (iv) Uninflected plural forms of both *viel* and *wenig* are occasionally found, mainly in colloquial speech: *Im Grunde interessieren mich furchtbar **wenig** Dinge außer meiner eigenen Arbeit* (Langgässer).
- (v) Inflected singular forms are used in a few set phrases, notably *vielen Dank*.

(c) *viel* and *wenig* can be used with a preceding definite article or other determiner

They then have the usual adjective endings:

Ich staunte über das vielen Geld, das er ausgab	<i>I was amazed at the large amount of money that he spent</i>
der Mut dieser vielen / wenigen Frauen	the courage of these many/few women
Sie hat ihr weniges Geld verloren	She lost her little bit of money
die wenigen , die ihn erkannten	<i>the few who recognized him</i>

(d) *wenig* in constructions like *wenig gutes Fleisch* could be ambiguous

It can mean ‘not much good meat’ or ‘not very good meat’. If the context does not resolve the ambiguity, the first meaning can be made clear by replacing *wenig* by *nicht viel*, i.e. *nicht viel gutes Fleisch*, the second by using *nicht sehr*, i.e. *nicht sehr gutes Fleisch*.

Similarly, *weniger gutes Fleisch* could mean ‘meat which was less good’ or ‘a smaller amount of good meat’ (English ‘less good meat’ is similarly ambiguous). This ambiguity can also be resolved if necessary by paraphrasing, i.e. *nicht so gutes Fleisch* or *nicht so viel gutes Fleisch*.

(e) The spelling of *so viel*, *wie viel*, *zu viel*, etc.

These combinations with *viel* and *wenig* are spelled as separate words: *so viel*, *wie viel*, *zu viel*, *zu wenig*, see 21.3.3.

5.5.26 *welcher* ‘some’, ‘any’

When used as an indefinite pronoun *welcher* has the endings of *dieser*, see

Table 5.2. It is typical of colloquial speech, other alternatives (i.e. *einige*, *etwas*, *manche*) usually being preferred in formal registers.

It is used without restriction in the plural, but in the singular it can only refer to a mass noun. It refers back to a noun which has just been mentioned or to ‘some people’ identified by a following relative clause:

Hast du Käse? Ja, ich habe welchen	<i>Have you got any cheese? Yes, I've got</i>
Wenn kein Wein mehr da ist, hole ich	<i>some</i>
uns welchen	
Ich brauche Marken. Kannst du mir	<i>If there's no wine left, I'll get us some</i>
welche geben?	<i>I need some stamps. Can you give me</i>
Hier sind welche vom Westfernsehen	<i>some/any?</i>
(Bednarz)	<i>Here are some people from Western</i>
	<i>television</i>

For the use of *welcher* as an interrogative, see 5.3.1, as a relative pronoun, see 5.4.2.

5.5.27 *wer* ‘someone’, ‘somebody’

wer is used as a pronoun in colloquial speech, where formal registers prefer *jemand* (see 5.5.15):

Dich hat wieder wer angerufen	<i>Someone's been on the phone for you</i>
Die hat wohl wieder wen angelächelt	<i>again</i>
Hast du wenigstens wem Bescheid	<i>It looks as if she's picked some guy up</i>
gesagt?	<i>again</i>
	<i>Have you at least told someone about it?</i>

For the use of *wer* as an interrogative pronoun, see 5.3.3.

6

Adjectives

ADJECTIVES are words which describe, modify, or qualify NOUNS and PRONOUNS. They do this in two main ways:

- either on their own or as part of a longer adjectival phrase. They then form part of a NOUN PHRASE, in which they come immediately **before** the **noun**, **after** any **determiners**. This is called the ATTRIBUTIVE use of the adjective, see [Table 6.1](#):

[Table 6.1](#) The noun phrase: adjectives

Determiner	Adjective/adjectival phrase	Noun
das	kaltes	Wasser
eine	schicke	Auto
viele	sehr hohe	Mauer
	jetzt über das Internet erhältliche	Games

- or by being used as a COMPLEMENT to a noun which is the subject or object of a verb, see also 16.6. This is called the PREDICATIVE use of the adjective:

Helga ist aber **klein**
Er isst die Würstchen **warm**

Das Mädchen lag **krank** im Bett
Sie strich die Wand **gelb**

In German, **attributive adjectives** have endings which indicate the same grammatical categories as nouns, i.e. CASE, NUMBER and GENDER. They are said to DECLINE in AGREEMENT with the noun.

There are **two main sets of adjective endings** in German, the so-called STRONG

and **WEAK** declensions, which are shown in [Tables 6.2](#) to [6.5](#). Which one is used depends on whether or not there is also a determiner in the noun phrase, and what kind of ending it has (if any). **Predicative adjectives** have no endings.

This chapter deals with the forms and uses of adjectives in German:

- the **declension** of adjectives (section 6.1)
- adjectives used as **nouns** (section 6.2)
- the use of **cases** with adjectives (section 6.3)
- the use of **prepositions** with adjectives (section 6.4)
- the **comparison** of adjectives (section 6.5)

[6.1 Declension and use of adjectives](#)

[6.1.1 Attributive and predicative adjectives](#)

In German, adjectives are **only declined** when they are used **attributively**:

ein gut er Mensch	diese schön en Tage	frisch es Brot
--------------------------	----------------------------	-----------------------

When used **predicatively**, or in phrases separated from the noun, they have **no endings**:

Der Mensch war gut	Er trat ungeduldig in das Zimmer
Er fühlte sich gesund	Wir essen die Möhren roh
Mein Vater, in Hamburg tätig , ...	Das Klima machte ihn krank
Sie hielt ihn für dumm	Das gilt als sicher

Optimistisch wie immer, sie ließ sich von ihrem Vorhaben nicht abhalten ein erstklassiger Kellner, **rasch**, nicht **schwerhörig** (*Wohmann*)

Das Gewehr gehörte zu ihm wie eine Frau zu einem Mann, **schweigsam**, **schön** und **zuverlässig** (*E.W. Heine*)

When an adjective is placed after the noun rather than before it, it does not have

an ending. This usage is typically poetic: *O Täler **weit**, o Höhen!* (Eichendorff), but it is also frequent as a stylistic device in advertising and technical language:

Henkel trocken	Schrankwand in Eiche rustikal oder Kiefer natur
Whisky pur	700 Nadelfeilen rund nach DIN 8342

6.1.2 The ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ declensions

There are **two basic declensions of the adjective** in German, conventionally labelled the **STRONG** and **WEAK** declensions. The **endings** of these declensions are shown in [Table 6.2](#), and they are illustrated in full noun phrases in [Tables 6.3](#), [6.4](#) and [6.5](#). These tables are arranged with the **neuters next to the masculines** to show the overlap between the endings more clearly.

[Table 6.2](#) The endings of adjectives in the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ declensions

Strong					Weak				
	Masc.	Neut.	Fem.	Plural		Masc.	Neut.	Fem.	Plural
Nom.	-er	-es		-e	Nom.		-e		
Acc.					Acc.				
Gen.	-en			-er	Gen.				
Dat.	-em			-en	Dat.		-en		

[Table 6.3](#) The ‘strong’ adjective endings with no determiner

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nom.	guter Wein	gutes Brot	gute Suppe	gute Weine
Acc.	guten Wein	gutes Brot	gute Suppe	gute Weine
Gen.	guten Weins	guten Brots	guter Suppe	guter Weine
Dat.	gutem Wein	gutem Brot	guter Suppe	guten Weinen

[Table 6.4](#) The ‘weak’ adjective endings with the definite article

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Nom.	der gute Wein	das gute Brot	die gute Suppe	die guten Weine
Acc.	den guten Wein	das gute Brot	die gute Suppe	die guten Weine
Gen.	des guten Weins	des guten Brots	der guten Suppe	der guten Weine

Dat.	dem guten Wein	dem guten Brot	der guten Suppe	den guten Weinen
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[Table 6.5](#) The ‘mixed’ adjective endings with the indefinite article

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine
Nom.	ein guter Wein	ein gutes Brot	eine gute Suppe
Acc.	einen guten Wein	ein gutes Brot	eine gute Suppe
Gen.	eines guten Weins	eines guten Brots	einer guten Suppe
Dat.	einem guten Wein	einem guten Brot	einer guten Suppe

(a) The strong declension has relatively more distinctive endings

They are given in [Table 6.2](#) and are **identical to** those of *dieser* (see [Table 5.2](#)), except that the **genitive singular** masculine and neuter ends in - *en*:

ein Stück international **en** Gewässers (*Presse*) die Perfektion rein **en** Klanges (*hifi ad*)

However, with **weak masculine nouns** which have the ending - *en* in the genitive singular (see 1.3.2), the strong adjective has the ending - *es*, e.g. *das Gesuch obig **es** Adressat **en***, but this combination is infrequent.

(b) The weak declension has only two endings

i.e. - *e* and - *en*, as shown in [Table 6.4](#). - *e* is used in the **nominative singular** of all genders and the **accusative singular feminine and neuter**. - *en* is used in **all other combinations** of case, number and gender.

6.1.3 The use of the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ declensions

The **underlying principle** governing the use of the strong and weak declensions is that the more distinct ‘**strong**’ endings are used if there is **no determiner** in the noun phrase or if the **determiner** has **no ending** to show the case, gender and number of the noun.

The **weak** endings are used if there is a **determiner with an ending**.

(a) The strong declension is used when there is no determiner in the noun phrase

frisch e Milch	frisch es Obst	durch genau e Beobachtung
mit neu em Mut	aus deutsch en Landen	das Niveau französisch er Filme

This also applies to adjectives used after **numerals** (including the genitives *zweier* and *dreier*, see 8.1.3a), after preceding **genitives**, and after the **genitive** of the **relative pronoun**:

zwei schön e Pfirsiche	<i>two fine peaches</i>
Karls unermüdlich er Eifer	Karl's tireless zeal
in Astrids klein em Arbeitszimmer	in Astrid's little study
mein Freund, dessen ältest er Sohn krank war	<i>my friend, whose eldest son was ill</i>

(b) The 'strong' declension is used when the determiner in the noun phrase has no ending

ein älter er Herr	unser klein es Kind	kein schön er Tag
mein neu es Kleid	viel indisch er Tee	ein paar grün e Äpfel
manch reich es	welch herrlich es Wetter!	mit was für englisch en
Land	bei solch herrlich em	Büchern
lauter faul e Äpfel	Wetter	

An important effect of this rule is that strong endings are used after the **endingless forms** of the **indefinite articles** *ein* and *kein* and of the **possessives** *mein*, *dein*, *unser*, etc. The declension of adjectives after these determiners, which involves both strong and weak endings, is often referred to as the **'mixed' declension** and it is illustrated in full in [Table 6.5](#).

(c) The 'weak' declension is used when the determiner has an

ending showing case, number and gender of the noun

This rule follows the principle given above and applies, in particular:

(i) After the **definite article** and **demonstrative** *der*

der weiß **e** Wein den weiß **en** Wein des weiß **en** Weines die weiß **en** Weine

(ii) After the **indefinite articles** *ein* and *kein* and the **possessives**, if they have an **ending**,

i.e. except in the nominative singular masculine and the nominative/accusative singular neuter, where the strong endings are used, as explained in (b) above and illustrated in [Table 6.5](#):

einen weiß **en** Wein seinem weiß **en** Wein ihrer weiß **en** Weine

(iii) After *dieser*, *jener*, *jeder* and *welcher*:

dieser weiß **e** Wein diesen weiß **en** Wein diesen weiß **en** Weinen
jenes weiß **en** Weines jedem weiß **en** Wein von welchem weiß **en** Wein?

(d) Two or more adjectives qualifying the same noun all have the same ending

dieser schön **e**, groß **e** Garten mein lieb **er** alt **er** Vater
gut **es** bayrisch **es** Bier die Lösung wichtig **er** politisch **er** Probleme

A deviation from this rule is that in the dative singular masculine or neuter, a further adjective can have the **weak ending** - *en* rather than the **strong ending** - *em*:

mit dunklem bayrisch **em** /bayrisch **en** Bier

nach langem beunruhigend **em** /beunruhigend **en** Schweigen

nach wochenlangem politisch **en** Tauziehen (*Presse*)

Some authorities do not accept the weak ending - *en* in such contexts as standard and consider only the strong ending - *em* to be correct, or that the weak ending may only be used if the second adjective is closely linked to the meaning of the noun in some way (as is arguably the case in the first example above). However, the weak and the strong endings are in practice equally frequent in modern written German, and the claim that there is (or should be) a difference in meaning between the alternatives is not borne out by usage. The weak ending is the norm with adjectives used as nouns, see 6.2.2b.

(e) The adjective is still declined if a noun is understood

‘one’ often has to be supplied in the equivalent English construction:

Welches Kleid hast du gewählt? Das **rote**
Ich habe mein Taschenmesser verloren. Ich
muss mir ein **neues** kaufen
Deutsche Weißweine sind süßer als
französische

*Which dress did you choose? The
red one
I’ve lost my penknife. I’ll have to
buy myself a new one
German white wines are sweeter
than French ones*

Adjectives used in this way with a noun understood are spelled with a small initial letter, not a capital, since they are not adjectives being used as nouns, see 6.2.1 and 21.2.1b.

(f) Adjectives governing more than one noun with a different gender cannot be understood

In English an adjective (with or without a determiner) can be understood in a series of linked noun phrases, e.g. *my old aunt and uncle, dear Ruth and Martin, the new table and chairs*. This is not possible in German if the nouns involved are of a different gender or number. The adjective (and determiner) must be repeated, with different endings as appropriate:

mein alt **er** Onkel und mein **e** alt **e** Tante
der neu **e** Tisch und die neu **en** Stühle

lieb **e** Ruth, lieb **er** Martin

(g) In a few special cases an attributive adjective has no ending

(i) In older German, adjectives sometimes lacked the strong ending - *es* before a neuter singular noun in the nominative or accusative, and this usage is retained in a few idioms and set phrases, e.g.:

etwas auf gut Glück tun
sich lieb Kind machen
Gut Ding will Weile haben
Ruhig Blut bewahren!
Kölnisch Wasser
ein gehörig/gut Stück
ein gut Teil

to take a chance
to ingratiate oneself
Nothing good is done in a hurry
Keep calm!
eau de Cologne
a substantial/good piece
a large proportion

(ii) Some foreign adjectives ending in a full vowel do not take endings. Many of these are colour terms, e.g. *lila*, *rosa*:

eine **klasse** Idee
ein **rosa** Kleid

ein **lila** Mantel
eine **prima** Ware

die **orange** Farbe
eine **super** Schau

In writing, a suffix such as - *farben* or -*farbig* is an acceptable alternative for the colour terms, e.g. *ein rosafarbenes Kleid*. In colloquial speech, an - *n*- is sometimes inserted as a base for the usual endings, e.g. *ein rosanes Kleid*. This is widespread but considered incorrect in written German.

(iii) An adjective used as an adverb to qualify a following adjective has no ending, see also 7.4.1c. Compare the difference between the following:

ein unheilbar **er**, fauler Junge
ein unheilbar fauler Junge

an incurable, lazy boy
an incurably lazy boy

However, this distinction is not always clear-cut, and the first of a pair of adjectives is sometimes left uninflected even if it is not being used as an

adverb. This is a common stylistic device in writing:

ein reingebürtiger Pole von traurig edler Gestalt (Grass)	<i>a pure-bred Pole with a sad, noble figure</i>
seine hochrot abstehenden Ohren (Grass)	<i>his deep red, protuberant ears</i>

einzig regularly has no ending if it can be considered as qualifying a following adjective, e.g. *die einzig(e) mögliche Lösung*. For similar usage with *derartig*, see 5.1.6c.

(iv) Adjectives in - *er* from **town names** do not add endings, e.g.:

die Leipziger Messe, die Lüneburger Heide, der Kölner Dom

(v) Adjectives in - **er** from **numerals** do not add endings, e.g. *die neunziger Jahre* ‘the nineties’.

(vi) Endingless adjectives are used with **names of letters** and **numerals** if no determiner is present:

groß A, klein z, römisch IV, arabisch 4

(vii) **halb** and **ganz** have no endings before geographical names used without an article:

halb Berlin, ganz Deutschland, ganz Europa

See 8.3.2 for details on the use of *halb*.

(h) Adjectives used after a personal pronoun usually have strong endings

ich arm **er** Deutscher

Wer hat dich dumm **en** Kerl gesehen?

Wer konnte euch treulos **en** Verrätern helfen?

Wer kümmert sich um uns früher **e** Kollegen?

However, weak endings are found in a few contexts:

- (i) In the (rarely used) dative singular, weak or strong endings can be used in the masculine and neuter, e.g. *mir mittellos **em** /mittellos **en** Mann*, but the feminine almost always has weak endings, e.g. *Er hat mir alt **en*** (rarely: *alt **er***) *Frau geschmeichelt*.
- (ii) Weak endings are more usual in the nominative plural: *wir jung **en** Kollegen*; *ihr hilflos **en** Kerle*. However, for ‘we Germans’ and ‘you Germans’ *wir Deutsch **e*** and *ihr Deutsch **e***, with strong endings, are in common use, although they are about half as frequent in practice as *wir Deutsch **en*** and *ihr Deutsch **en***.

6.1.4 Adjective declension after indefinites and quantifiers

Following the principle outlined in section 6.1.3, adjectives usually have ‘weak’ endings following any determiner which itself has an ending showing the case, number and gender of the noun. However, usage is at variance with this principle after some of the indefinites and quantifiers dealt with in section 5.5, and there is still a certain amount of variation with all of them, particularly in the plural.

(a) In the singular the ‘weak’ endings are normally used after all indefinites and quantifiers

mancher brav e Mann	mit folgender nachdrücklich en Warnung
durch irgendwelchen pur en	mit einigem bühnentechnisch en Aufwand
Unsinn	(Zeit)
mit allem möglich en Fleiß	aus wenigem schlecht en Wein
von vielem kalt en Wasser	
solches dumm e Gerede	

The only frequent exception to this rule is that *jeglicher* is most often followed by strong endings, e.g. *jegliches **organisches** Leben* (Grzimek).

(b) In the plural usage varies with different indefinites and quantifiers

(i) Adjectives after *alle*, *beide* and *sämtliche* in the plural usually have the ‘weak’ endings

alle fremd en Truppen	sämtliche schön en Bücher
beide bekannt en Politiker	aller interessiert en Zuschauer

‘Strong’ endings are occasionally found, especially after *beide*, e.g. *beide bekannte Politiker*.

(ii) Adjectives after *irgendwelche* and *solche* in the plural can have either ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ endings, but ‘weak’ endings are more frequent:

solche schön **en** (*less common*: schöne) Tage

irgendwelcher interessiert **en** (*less common*: interessierter) Zuschauer

(iii) Adjectives after *manche* in the plural can have either ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ endings, but ‘strong’ endings are more frequent:

manche schön **e** (*less common*: schönen) Aussichten

(iv) Adjectives after *einige*, *etliche*, *folgende*, *mehrere*, *viele*, *wenige* in the plural usually have ‘strong’ endings:

einige neu e ICE-Verbindungen	etliche fremd e Besucher
folgende bezeichend e Beispiele	mehrere groß e Städte
vieler nichtbeamtet er Österreicher (<i>Kurier</i>)	weniger günstig er Zeiten

Weak endings are occasionally found, most often in the genitive plural, e.g. *einiger groß **en** ausländisch **en** Firmen* for (more frequent) *einiger groß **er** ausländisch **er** Firmen*.

(v) For adjective endings after *ander*, see 5.5.2.

(c) Indefinites and quantifiers preceded by another determiner are declined like adjectives

Some indefinites and quantifiers can be preceded by another determiner, i.e. by a definite or indefinite article, one of the demonstratives *dieser* or *jener*, or by one of the possessives *mein*, *dein*, etc. They are then **treated like adjectives** and have a ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ adjective ending according to the usual rules, as does any further following adjective:

eine solche interessante Nachricht mit der folgenden krassen Behauptung mit seinem wenigen deutschen Geld	aller solchen guten Wünsche diese vielen alten Dörfer mein sämtliches kleines Vermögen
--	---

(d) Adjectives after endingless indefinites and quantifiers

Some indefinites and quantifiers have alternative forms without endings, as explained under the relevant determiner in section 5.5. These endingless forms are followed by adjectives with strong endings, following the general principle given in (b) above:

viel deutsch es Geld	manch schön er Tag	solch dumm es Gerede
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6.1.5 Irregularities in the spelling of some adjectives

(a) The spelling of inflected adjectives in - *el*, - *en*, - *er*

These often lose the - *e* - of the root, or occasionally the - *e* - of the ending.

(i) **Adjectives in - *el*** drop the - *e* - when an ending is added:

ein **dunkler** Wald, eine **respektable** Leistung

When used as a noun, *dunkel* drops the - *e* - of the ending, e.g. *im Dunkel* **n**

‘in the dark’.

(ii) **Adjectives in - *en*** can drop the - *e*- when an ending is added.

This is usual in everyday speech, but uncommon in writing: *eine metallene* (rarely written: *metallne*) *Stimme*, *ein seltener* (rarely written: *seltner*) *Vogel*.

(iii) **Adjectives in - *er***

Foreign adjectives and those with - *au* - or - *eu* - before the - *er* always drop the - *e*-:

eine **makabre** Geschichte, mit **teuren** Weinen, durch **saure** Milch

Other adjectives in -*er* usually keep the - *e*- in written German, although it is usually dropped in speech: *eine muntere* (rarely written: *muntre*) *Frau*. For the spelling of declined *ander*, which is a special case, see 5.5.2.

The - *e* - of the comparative ending - *er* (see 6.5) is rarely omitted in writing, e.g. *eine bessere* (rarely in writing: *bessre*) *Lösung*.

(iv) The - *e* - is quite often omitted in - *el* - or - *er* - in the **middle of an adjective** which has endings, e.g. **neb(e)lige** Tage, eine **wäss(e)rige** Suppe, etc.

(b) hoch ‘high’

hoch has the special form **hoh** - to which the usual endings are added:

der Berg ist **hoch**, *but*: ein **hoher** Berg

(c) A few adjectives have alternative base forms with or without final - *e*

e.g. *Er ist feig* or *feige* ‘He is cowardly’. These adjectives are:

blöd(e)	bös(e)	fad(e)	irr(e)	leis(e)	mild(e)
müd(e)	öd(e)	träg(e)	trüb(e)	vag(e)	zäh(e)

With all except *blöd(e)*, *mild(e)* and *zäh(e)*, the **alternative with - e** tends to be preferred in written German. In speech the form without - e is more frequent unless the adjective is stressed.

6.1.6 Extended attribute phrases

In German extended adjectival phrases can be used attributively, i.e. before the noun, in a way quite unlike any English construction. Such phrases include a noun phrase (in the case governed by the adjective) or a prepositional phrase (with the preposition governed by the particular adjective), and they can sometimes be very long. This EXTENDED ATTRIBUTE construction is very frequent in formal German, especially in technical and official registers. In English such phrases can sometimes be placed after the noun, but most commonly they correspond to an English relative clause:

dieses **seinem Vorgesetzten äußerst
nützliche** Gespräch
zum Einsatz bereite Truppen
eine **von rhetorischen Effekten freie**
Rede
eine **für sie ganz typische** Haltung

*this conversation which was very
useful to his superior
troops (who are) ready to be deployed
a speech (which is/was) free of
rhetorical devices
an attitude (which is/was) quite typical
of her*

This construction is very frequent with participles, see 11.5.1f.

6.2 Adjectives used as nouns

6.2.1 Any adjective can be used as a noun in German

It is then written with an initial capital letter:

der **Alte** *the old man*

das **Alte** *old things*

die **Alte** *the old woman*

die **Alten** *the old people*

English cannot turn adjectives into nouns as easily, except in a few restricted cases when referring to groups of people, e.g. ‘the young’, ‘the old’, ‘the Dutch’, ‘the good, the bad and the ugly’, etc., and a dummy noun like ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘thing(s)’, ‘people’ usually has to be added. Overusing words like *Ding* or *Leute* where an adjective used as a noun would be more appropriate is a characteristic feature of the German of English learners.

Idiomatic German exploits fully the possibilities of concise expression offered by the fact that adjectives can be used as nouns in this way. In particular, they are often used where full clauses would be needed in English:

Die Farbe dieser Vögel war das für mich

Interessante

Er hat sich über das **Gesagte** aufgeregt

Das **Erschreckende** an diesem Vorfall
war seine scheinbare Unabwendbarkeit

Die gerade **Eingestiegenen** waren ein
älterer Herr und eine elegante Dame
ein Ort, wo das irgendwie zu denkende

Konkrete unwiederbringlich in

Abstraktes umschlägt

*The colour of these birds was what
interested me*

He got annoyed about what had been
said

What was terrifying about this
occurrence was its apparent
inevitability

The people who had just got in were
an elderly man and an elegant lady
*a point where concrete reality, however
it may be imagined, becomes
irrevocably abstract*

Adjectives used as nouns in this way are different from adjectives being used with a preceding noun understood. These are spelled with a **small** initial letter, see 6.1.3e. Compare *Kennst du den Alten?* ‘Do you know the old man?’ with *Hast du einen neuen Wagen gekauft? Nein, einen alten* (*Wagen* understood). ‘Did you buy a new car? No, an old one.’

6.2.2 The declension of adjectives used as nouns

(a) Adjectives used as nouns decline like attributive adjectives

They have weak or strong endings according to the rules given in 6.1. They thus have the same endings as any preceding adjective, e.g. *ein zuverlässig **er** Angestellter **er**, von einer unbekannt **en** Fremd **en***. The declension with the definite and indefinite articles of a typical masculine adjective used as a noun, *der Angestellte* ‘employee’, is shown in [Table 6.6](#).

[Table 6.6](#) Declension of adjectives used as nouns

		Definite article	Indefinite article
Singular	Nominative	der Angestellte	ein Angestellter
	Accusative	den Angestellten	einen Angestellten
	Genitive	des Angestellten	eines Angestellten
	Dative	dem Angestellten	einem Angestellten
Plural	Nominative	die Angestellten	Angestellte
	Accusative	die Angestellten	Angestellte
	Genitive	der Angestellten	Angestellter
	Dative	den Angestellten	Angestellten

der Angestellte is naturally only used of a male employee. A female employee will be *die Angestellte*, *eine Angestellte*, with the appropriate endings, see 6.2.3.

Adjectives used as nouns in this way should not be confused with ‘weak’ masculine nouns, whose declension looks quite similar, see [Table 1.8](#). Note the difference between the endings of adjectives used as nouns and ‘weak’ masculine (or other regular) nouns:

Adjective used as noun	‘Weak’ masculine (or other) noun
der Deutsche, des Deutschen <i>German</i> NB: ein Deutsch er	der Franzose, des Franzosen <i>Frenchman</i> NB: ein Franzos e
das Junge <i>young of an animal</i> NB: ein Jung es	der Junge, des Jungen <i>boy</i> NB: ein Jung e die Fremde <i>foreign parts</i> NB: in der

die Fremde *female stranger* NB: mit der
Fremd **en**

Fremd **e** *abroad*

(b) In a few contexts adjectives used as nouns decline in a different way from other adjectives

(i) In the **dative singular** and the **genitive plural** the adjective used as a noun can have the **weak ending** - **en** if preceded by an adjective with the strong endings - *em* or - *er*. This is a general rule with masculine nouns, but less regular with feminines or in the genitive plural:

Ich sprach mit Karls alt **em** Bekannt **en**, mit Helmut's englisch **er** Bekannt **en** /Bekannt **er**

die Freistellung zahlreich **er** Angestellt **er** /Angestellt **en**

(ii) In apposition (see 2.6), the weak ending is used in the dative singular even if there is no determiner:

Er sprach mit Karl Friedrichsen, Angestellt **en** (*rarely*: Angestellt **em**) der BASF in Ludwigshafen

Er sprach mit Heike König, Angestellt **en** (*never*: Angestellt **er**) der BASF in Ludwigshafen

In practice, constructions like this are avoided. The nominative case is used: *mit Karl Friedrichsen, Angestellter der BASF*, or an article is added: *mit Karl Friedrichsen, dem/einem Angestellten der BASF*.

(iii) The neuters *das Äußere*, *das Ganze* and *das Innere* now usually have strong endings in the nominative/accusative singular after the indefinite article or the possessives if another adjective comes first, i.e.: *sein schlichtes Äußeres*, *ein einheitliches Ganzes*, *mein eigenes Inneres*. Using the weak ending in these contexts, i.e. *sein schlichtes Äußeres*, etc., is no longer current.

6.2.3 Masculine and feminine adjectival nouns

(a) Masculine and feminine adjectival nouns usually refer to people

The gender is indicated by using the appropriate article, e.g. **der** *Fremde* ‘the (male) stranger’, **die** *Fremde* ‘the (female) stranger’. Many common ones like the following correspond to simple nouns in English:

der Abgeordnete <i>representative</i>	der Gesandte <i>emissary</i>
der Adlige <i>aristocrat</i>	der Heilige <i>saint</i>
der Angestellte <i>employee</i>	der Industrielle <i>industrialist</i>
der Asylsuchende <i>asylum-seeker</i>	der Jugendliche <i>young person</i>
der Beamte <i>civil servant</i>	der Obdachlose <i>homeless person</i>
der Bekannte <i>acquaintance</i>	der Reisende <i>traveller</i>
der Deutsche <i>German</i>	der Staatsangehörige <i>citizen</i>
der Erwachsene <i>adult</i>	der Überlebende <i>survivor</i>
der Freiwillige <i>volunteer</i>	der Verlobte <i>fiancé</i>
der Fremde <i>stranger</i>	der Verwandte <i>relative</i>
der Gefangene <i>prisoner</i>	der Vorgesetzte <i>superior</i>
der Geistliche <i>clergyman</i>	der Vorsitzende <i>chairman</i>

(b) A few feminine adjectival nouns are special cases

(i) A few referring to things are always feminine, e.g.:

die Elektrische <i>tram</i> (older S. Ger.)	die Rechte, Linke <i>right, left (hand); (political) right, left</i>
---	--

e.g. *überdrüssig des Terrors einer revolutionären Linken* (SZ)

(ii) Some feminines which are in origin adjectival nouns are now often treated as regular feminine nouns:

die Brünnette <i>the brunette</i>	die Parallele <i>the parallel (line)</i>
die Gerade <i>the straight line</i>	die Variable <i>the variable</i>

die Horizontale *the horizontal*

die Vertikale *the vertical*

Usage with these is rather variable. Especially in the case of the mathematical terms, both forms are commonly used, and, for example, *in der Horizontal* **en** is rather more frequent than *in der Horizontal* **e**. On the other hand, *die Brünette* is now almost only ever used as a regular feminine noun.

(iii) *die Illustrierte* ‘the magazine’ is most often treated as an adjectival noun, e.g. *Ich habe zwei Illustriert e gekauft* and *in dieser Illustriert en*. However, regular noun endings are still not unusual, e.g. *zwei Illustriert e* or *in dieser Illustriert e*.

(iv) Exceptionally, the feminine form corresponding to *der Beamte* is *die Beamtin*. This is a regular feminine noun, with the plural *die Beamtinnen*.

6.2.4 Neuter adjectival nouns

(a) Most neuter adjectival nouns denote abstract or collective ideas

Es ist schon **Schlimmes** passiert
Er hat **Hervorragendes** geleistet
der Schauer des **Verbotenen** und
Versagten (*Zweig*)
zugleich immer aufbauend auf das
Erreichte (*Mercedes advert*)

Bad things have already happened
He has achieved outstanding things
the frightening fascination of what is
forbidden or denied
at the same time always building on
what has been achieved

Note, though, *das Junge* ‘the young’ (of an animal), see 1.1.11.

The names of regions within the German-speaking countries are often given in the form of neuter adjectival nouns, e.g.:

Nach der Wende zogen sie ins
Mecklenburgische

Hier sind wir im
Thüringischen

Vier maskierte Männer überfallen eine Spielhalle **im Hessischen** (*BrZ*)

(b) Neuter adjectival nouns are frequently used after indefinites

especially after *alles*, *etwas*, *nichts*, *viel(es)*, *wenig*, see 5.5. These have weak or strong endings depending on the ending of the indefinite, e.g.:

all es Gut e	nichts Neu es
von all em Gut en	von nichts Neu em
weiter es Interessant e	lauter Neu es
folgend es Neu e	viel/wenig Interessant es
viel es Interessant e	von viel Interessant em
von viel em Interessant en	

(c) Names of languages have the form of neuter adjectival nouns

For the use of the article with these, see 4.2.2d.

(i) The most common form is a neuter adjective.

This form is used to refer to the language in a specific context, or when an adjective precedes it. It has no endings, except that, optionally, - s can be added in the genitive (see 1.3.5b):

Wir lernen **Spanisch**, **Französisch**, **Russisch**, **Englisch**

Die Aussprache des modernen **Deutsch(s)**

eine Übersetzung aus **dem amerikanischen Englisch**

(ii) To refer to the language in a general sense, a declined adjectival neuter noun is used.

It always has the definite article:

Das Englische ist **dem Deutschen** verwandt

eine Übersetzung aus **dem Tschechischen**

This form cannot be used with a preceding adjective; if an adjective is present,

then the endingless form is used:

Mit meinem schlechten Deutsch komme ich nicht weit

(d) Names of colours

These usually have the form of a neuter adjectival noun which has no endings, except that - s is usually added in the genitive singular. The plural is endingless in written German, though - s is sometimes used in speech:

das **Grün** der Wiesen
von einem glänzenden **Rot**
in **Schwarz** gekleidet

dieses hässlichen **Gelbs**
die beiden **Blau** (*spoken*: Blaus)

In a few set phrases with the definite article, colour nouns are declined:

ins **Grüne** fahren
ins **Schwarze** treffen

Es ist das **Gelbe** vom Ei
das **Blaue** vom Himmel herunter versprechen

6.3 Cases with adjectives

Many adjectives can be used with a noun dependent on them, which then takes a particular case – we say that the adjective ‘governs’ a noun in that case. The case used depends on the individual adjective:

- **dative:** *Sie ist ihrem Bruder* sehr ähnlich (section 6.3.1)
- **accusative:** *Ich bin den Lärm* nicht gewohnt (section 6.3.2)
- **genitive:** *Sie ist der deutschen Sprache* mächtig (section 6.3.3)

6.3.1 Adjectives which govern the dative

(a) The dative is the most common case used with adjectives

Sie waren **ihrem Freund** beim Umzug
behilflich

Ihre Meinung ist **uns** wichtig

Er war **seinem Gegner** überlegen

Ein **ihr** unbekannter Mann trat herein

*They helped their friend when he
moved house*

Your opinion is important to us

He surpassed his opponent

A man she didn't know walked in

The following list gives a selection of frequent adjectives which govern the dative.

ähnlich* *like, similar*
angenehm[†] *agreeable*
begreiflich *comprehensible*
behilflich *helpful*
bekannt *known, familiar*
bequem *comfortable*
bewusst *known*
böse *angry*
dankbar *grateful*
eigen *peculiar*
entbehrlich[†] *unnecessary*
ergeben *devoted, attached*
fern *distant*
fremd *strange*
gefährlich[†] *dangerous*
gefällig *obliging*
nicht geheuer *scary*
gehorsam *obedient*
geläufig *familiar*
gemeinsam *common*
gerecht *just*
gesinnt *inclined*
gewogen (lit.) *well-disposed*
günstig *favourable*

heilig *holy, sacred*
hinderlich *awkward*
klar *obvious*
lästig[†] *troublesome*
leicht[†] *easy*
möglich[†] *possible*
nahe* *near, close*
nötig *necessary*
nützlich[†] *useful*
peinlich[†] *embarrassing*
schädlich[†] *injurious, harmful*
schuldig *owing*
schwer *difficult*
teuer *expensive*
treu* *faithful*
überlegen *superior*
verhasst *hateful*
verständlich[†] *comprehensible*
wichtig[†] *important*
widerlich *repugnant*
willkommen *welcome*
zugänglich[†] *accessible*
zuträglich *beneficial*

The adjective usually **follows** the noun (or pronoun) dependent on it, but those

marked with * in the list above may come before a noun. Those marked with † may alternatively be used with *für* (before or after the adjective), e.g. *Das war für mich unangenehm/unangenehm für mich*, and *böse* can also be used with *auf* or *mit* (see 6.4.1a).

(b) Some adjectives which govern the dative are only used predicatively

i.e. they are only used in conjunction with the verb *sein*:

Sie ist mir zuwider	<i>She is repugnant to me</i>
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These are:

abhold (arch., lit.) <i>ill-disposed</i>	hold (arch., lit.) <i>favourably disposed</i>
feind (arch., lit.) <i>hostile</i>	untertan <i>subordinate</i>
freund (lit.) <i>friendly</i>	zugetan <i>well-disposed</i>
gram (lit.) <i>angry (with)</i>	zuwider <i>repugnant</i>

This construction is also used with the adjectives meaning ‘all the same’, e.g.:

Das ist **mir** gleich *That's all the same to me*

i.e. *einerlei*, *egal* (coll.), *gleich*, *piepe* (coll.), *schnuppe*, *wurs(ch)t* (coll.)

zugetan can be used attributively, e.g. *Madame de Pompadour, die den Künsten zugetane Mätresse Ludwigs XV (HAZ)*.

(c) Adjectives expressing sensations

Many adjectives which express a sensation are used in the predicate of *sein* with a dative of the person experiencing the sensation, e.g.:

Es ist mir heiß, kalt, schlecht, übel, warm

More detail on these is given in 2.5.4c.

6.3.2 Adjectives which govern the accusative

These are all used in constructions with *sein* or *werden*, although some can also be used with a following *dass*-clause or an infinitive clause with *zu*.

jdn./etwas * gewahr werden (lit.) Wir wurden unseren Irrtum gewahr	<i>to become aware of sth./sb. We realized our mistake</i>
etwas gewohnt sein Ich bin den Lärm nicht gewohnt	<i>to be used to sth. I'm not used to the noise</i>
etwas * leid sein Ich bin das schlechte Essen leid	<i>to be tired of /fed up with I'm fed up with the bad food</i>
etwas/jdn. los sein/werden Endlich bin ich den Schnupfen los	<i>to be/get rid of sth./sb. At last I've got rid of the cold</i>
etwas/jdn.* satt sein/haben Er ist/hat es gründlich satt	<i>to be sick of sb./sth. He's thoroughly sick of it</i>
jdm. etwas schuldig sein Sie ist ihm eine Erklärung schuldig	<i>to owe sb. sth. She owes him an explanation</i>
etwas * wert sein Es ist das Papier nicht wert, auf dem es steht (MM)	<i>to be worth sth. It's not worth the paper it's written on</i>

(i) The adjectives asterisked can be used with a genitive in formal registers, see 6.3.3; in the case of *satt* this is only possible in conjunction with *sein*, not with *haben*.

(ii) *schuldig* is used with a genitive in the sense of 'guilty', e.g. *Er ist des Verbrechens schuldig* 'He is guilty of the crime'.

6.3.3 Adjectives which govern the genitive

(a) The genitive with adjectives is mainly restricted to formal German

A number of the adjectives concerned have alternative constructions in less formal registers, as indicated below, while a few adjectives most often used with a following accusative (see 6.3.2) can alternatively be used with a genitive in more formal registers. With the exception of *bar*, these adjectives always follow the noun:

	Seine Handlungsweise war bar aller Vernunft <i>His action was devoid of all reason</i>
	Ich war mir meines Irrtums bewusst <i>I was conscious of my mistake</i>
bar devoid of	
bewusst conscious of	Er ist einer solchen Tat nicht fähig <i>He is not capable of such a deed</i>
fähig capable of (or with zu + noun, see 6.4.1a)	Sie war seines Erfolges froh <i>She was pleased about his success</i>
froh pleased at (usually: über)	Wir wurden unseres Irrtums gewahr <i>We became aware of our mistake</i>
gewahr aware of (more often with acc.)	Sie können meiner Unterstützung gewiss sein <i>You can be certain of my support</i>
gewiss certain of	Sie ist des Deutschen absolut mächtig <i>She has a complete command of German</i>
mächtig master of	Wer des Schauens und Kaufens müde war (SGT) <i>Whoever was tired of looking (at things) and buying (them)</i>
müde tired of	Der Angeklagte ist des Hochverrats schuldig <i>The accused is guilty of high treason</i>
schuldig guilty of (see 6.3.2)	Er ist sich seiner Sache noch nicht sicher (Zeit) <i>He is not quite sure of his ground</i>
sicher sure of	Er sagte, er sei des Lebens überdrüssig (HMP) <i>He said he was tired of life</i>
überdrüssig tired of (or, rarely, with acc.)	der Wille, erhalten zu wollen, was des Erhaltens wert ist (SGT) <i>the desire to keep what is worth keeping</i>
wert worthy of (often with acc.)	Er ist dieser Ehre nicht würdig <i>He is not worthy of this honour</i>
würdig worthy of	

Note that a reflexive pronoun is always inserted when *bewusst* and *sicher* are

used with a genitive.

(b) *voll* and *voller* are used in a number of alternative constructions

- (i) In formal written language ***voll*** and ***voller*** are used with the **genitive**:

Das Theater war voll aufmerksamer Zuschauer, ein Korb voller grüner Äpfel

- (ii) Alternatively, ***voll*** and ***voller*** can be used with the dative singular

*ein Korb voll grünem Obst, mit einer Schüssel voller warmem Wasser
(Grass)*

- (iii) With a noun standing alone, ***voll*** or ***voller*** can be used with a **nominative**:

ein Korb voll Obst, voll(er) Äpfel

- (iv) With a noun qualified by an adjective, ***voll von*** can be used:

ein Korb voll von herrlichem Obst, roten Äpfeln

- (v) ***voll mit*** is particularly frequent in spoken registers:

ein Korb voll mit herrlichem Obst, roten Äpfeln

(c) Adjectives governing the genitive which are restricted to predicate use

Some adjectives governing the genitive are largely restricted to use in the predicate after *sein*, *bleiben* and/or *werden*. Most of them are used only in formal (particularly legal or official) written German:

ansichtig	bedürftig	eingedenk	geständig	gewärtig	habhaft
(un)kundig	ledig	teilhaftig	verdächtig	verlustig	

Examples from official legal language:

Er ist **der Bürgerrechte** für verlustig
erklärt worden

Sie versuchen mittlerweile **der**
Verbrecher lateinamerikanischer
Militärdiktaturen habhaft zu werden
(KIZ)

He has been deprived of his civic rights

*In the meantime they are attempting
to arrest criminals from Latin
American military dictatorships*

6.4 Adjectives with prepositions

Many adjectives can be linked to a noun in a prepositional construction, in which case we speak of the adjective 'governing' a particular preposition:

Das ist **von** dem Wetter **abhängig**
die **um** ihre Kinder **besorgte**
Mutter

Er war **mit** meinem Entschluss
einverstanden

Which preposition is used depends on the individual adjective, and the preposition often retains little of its full meaning. A selection of adjectives governing prepositions is given below, especially those which are frequent or which have a construction different from their usual English equivalents.

The prepositional phrase may precede or follow the adjective. If it contains a noun it commonly comes before the adjective, but it may follow; if it contains a pronoun it almost invariably follows, e.g.:

either:
or (less usual):
but always:

Er ist **über den neuen Lehrling** verärgert

Er ist verärgert **über den neuen Lehrling**

Er ist verärgert **über ihn**

(a) Frequently used adjectives governing a preposition

abhängig von
angewiesen auf etwas/jdn. sein Wir waren
auf uns selber angewiesen

dependent on
to have to rely on sth./sb. We had

ärgerlich auf/über
 *arm an
 aufmerksam auf Sie machte mich auf
 meinen Irrtum aufmerksam
 begeistert von/über
 berechtigt zu Sie sind zu diesem Vorwurf
 berechtigt
 bereit zu Die Truppen waren zum Einsatz
 bereit
 besorgt um
 bezeichnend für
 blass, bleich vor Er war völlig blass/bleich
 vor Entsetzen
 böse auf/mit Bist du böse auf mich / mit mir
 ? (or Bist du mir böse? see 6.3.1a)
 charakteristisch für
 dankbar für Ich war ihm für seine Hilfe
 dankbar
 durstig nach
 eifersüchtig auf
 einverstanden mit Bist du mit diesem
 Vorschlag einverstanden?
 empfänglich für
 empfindlich gegen Sie ist sehr empfindlich
 gegen Kälte
 ersichtlich aus Das ist aus seiner letzten
 Bemerkung ersichtlich
 fähig zu (or genitive, see 6.3.3a) Sie ist zu
 einer solchen Tat nicht fähig
 fertig mit etwas sein Bist du mit dem Essen
 schon fertig?
 geeignet für/zu Er ist für diese / zu dieser
 Arbeit nicht geeignet
 gefasst auf Mach dich gefasst auf seine
 Reaktion !
 geil auf (*coll.*) Ich bin so geil auf Tennis, sagte
 er (*MM*)
 gespannt auf Ich bin auf diesen Film sehr

to rely on ourselves
 annoyed with
 poor in
 aware of She pointed out my
 mistake
 enthusiastic about
 justified in You are justified in
 making this reproach
 ready for The troops were ready
 to be deployed
 anxious about
 characteristic of
 pale with He was pale with terror
 angry, cross with Are you
 annoyed with me?
 characteristic of
 grateful for I was grateful to him
 for his help
 thirsty for
 jealous of
 in agreement with Do you agree
 with this proposal?
 susceptible, receptive to
 sensitive to She is very sensitive
 to cold
 obvious, clear from That is clear
 from what he just said
 capable of She is not capable of
 doing anything like that
 to have finished sth. Have you
 already finished your meal?
 suitable for He is not suitable for
 that kind of work
 ready, prepared for Get ready for
 his reaction
 keen on I am so keen on tennis,
 he said
 extremely curious about I am

gespannt	<i>dying to see that film</i>
gewöhnt an Ich bin jetzt an das englische Bier gewöhnt	<i>accustomed/used to I am used to English beer now</i>
gierig nach	greedy for
gleichgültig gegen/gegenüber	indifferent to(wards)
höflich zu/gegenüber	polite to(wards)
hungrig nach	hungry for
interessiert an	interested in
müde von Er war müde von der schweren Arbeit (see also 6.3.3a)	tired from He was tired from working so hard
neidisch auf	envious of
neugierig auf	curious about
*reich an	rich in
scharf auf (<i>coll.</i>) Er ist scharf auf seine Rechte	keen on He is keen on his rights to be blamed for sth. Who was to blame for the argument?
schuld an etwas sein/haben Wer war/hatte an dem Streit schuld?	safe from
sicher vor	proud of
stolz auf	dumb with
stumm vor	typical of
typisch für	convinced of
überzeugt von	independent of
unabhängig von	married to
verheiratet mit	in love with She is in love with her friend's brother
verliebt in Sie ist in den Bruder ihrer Freundin verliebt	different to/from
verschieden von	(very, mad) keen on He is mad
versessen auf Er ist versessen auf alte Sportwagen	keen on old sports cars
verwandt mit	related to
vorbereitet auf	prepared for
wütend auf Er war wütend auf seine Chefin	<i>mad at, furious with He was mad at his boss</i>
zornig auf	angry with
zuständig für	<i>responsible for</i>

If they are governed by an adjective, *auf* and *über* are always followed by the accusative case, and *vor* is always followed by the dative.

*Note that *arm* and *reich* usually precede a phrase with *an*, even if it has a noun, e.g. *Das Land ist arm/reich an Bodenschätzen*.

(b) *über* is used with many adjectives to mean ‘about’

In this usage it is always followed by the accusative, e.g.:

Sie war erfreut, erstaunt, froh, verwundert **über** seinen Erfolg

Frequent adjectives which govern *über* (see also 18.3.12e):

aufgebracht <i>outraged</i>	erfreut <i>delighted</i>
beschämt <i>ashamed</i>	erstaunt <i>amazed</i>
bestürzt, betroffen <i>full of consternation</i>	froh <i>glad</i> (see 6.3.3a)
empört, entrüstet <i>indignant</i>	glücklich <i>happy</i>
entzückt <i>delighted</i>	traurig <i>sad</i>
erbittert <i>bitter</i>	verwundert <i>astonished</i>
erboost <i>infuriated</i>	

(c) Many adjectives governing prepositions can be used with a following *dass*-clause or an infinitive clause with *zu*

These clauses are often anticipated by the prepositional adverb (*da* (*r*) + preposition), e.g. *daran*, *damit*, see 3.5:

Er ist davon abhängig, dass ihm sein Bruder hilft	<i>He is dependent on his brother helping him</i>
Er ist davon abhängig, das Geld zu erhalten	<i>He is dependent on receiving the money</i>
Wir sind dazu bereit, Ihnen darüber Auskünfte zu geben	<i>We are prepared to give you some information about this</i>
Sie war darüber froh, dass sie ihn noch sehen würde	<i>She was pleased that she would still see him</i>

There are no hard and fast rules for when the prepositional adverb is used in

these constructions and when it is not. With a number of the adjectives given in section 6.4.1 it is quite optional and pairs of sentences like the following are equally acceptable and grammatical:

Ich **bin** gewöhnt, jeden Tag eine Stunde zu üben

Ich **bin daran** gewöhnt, jeden Tag eine Stunde zu üben

Using the prepositional adverb seems to focus emphasis on the content of the dependent clause or infinitive phrase. In practice it is more commonly used than left out, even where it is optional, especially in written German.

6.5 Comparison of adjectives

Qualities can be compared using special forms of adjectives (and adverbs, see 7.7). These are called the **COMPARATIVE** and **SUPERLATIVE** forms. Thus, for the adjective *groß*:

positive degree:	Mein Haus ist groß	<i>My house is big</i>
comparative degree:	Dein Haus ist größer	<i>Your house is bigger</i>
superlative degree:	Ihr Haus ist das größte	<i>Her house is the biggest</i>

The **comparative** is normally used to compare two items, the **superlative** more than two:

der **größere** der beiden Brüder

Von den zwei Büchern über Berlin hat er das **billigere** gekauft

der **größte** von acht Jungen

Von diesen vielen Büchern hat er das **billigste** gekauft

As in English, this rule is not universally observed in everyday speech, and phrasings like *der größte der beiden Brüder* are often heard, although they are considered incorrect.

This section deals with the formation and use of the comparative and superlative degree of adjectives, and other means of comparison in German:

- the **formation** of comparatives and superlatives (section 6.5.1)
- the **uses** of the **comparative** and other means of comparison (section 6.5.2)
- the **uses** of the **superlative** (section 6.5.3)

6.5.1 Formation of the comparative and superlative

(a) The comparative and superlative are formed by means of the endings *-er* and *-st*

These are the regular endings and they are simply added to the positive form, as shown for some common adjectives in [Table 6.7](#). As the superlative always occurs in a declined form, with the definite article, *das* is included with all examples. Exceptions to this regular pattern are detailed in sections (b) to (h) below.

[Table 6.7](#) Regular formation of comparative and superlative

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
tief <i>deep</i>	tief er	(das) tief st e
schön <i>beautiful</i>	schön er	(das) schön st e
langsam <i>slow</i>	langsam er	(das) langsam st e
freundlich <i>friendly, kind</i>	freundlich er	(das) freundlich st e
unwiderstehlich <i>irresistible</i>	unwiderstehlich er	(das) unwiderstehlich st e

In English we form comparatives and superlatives in two ways. With short adjectives, we use the endings *-er* and *-est*, with longer adjectives we use ‘more’ and ‘most’. In German, the endings *-er* and *-st* are used **no matter how long the adjective is**; *mehr* and *meist* are not normally used in comparatives and superlatives, except in the few special cases explained in 6.5.1h.

Comparative and superlative forms decline in the same way as any adjective when used before a noun, with the same weak or strong endings (see 6.1), e.g.:

ein schneller **er** Zug, der schnellst **e** Zug, in der tiefst **en** Schlucht der Erde

(b) Some common adjectives have quite irregular comparative and superlative forms

groß	gr ö ß er	das gr ö ßt e	<i>big, large</i>
gut	besser	das beste	good
hoch	h ö her	das h ö ch st e	high
nah	n ä her	das n ä chst e	<i>near</i>

(c) Comparative and superlative forms with *Umlaut*

A few mostly very common adjectives have *Umlaut* on the root vowel in the comparative and superlative, in addition to the ending:

arm – ä rmer – der ä rmste	klug – kl ü ger – der kl ü gste	lang – l ä nger – der l ä ngste
-------------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------------------

(i) The following adjectives **always have *Umlaut*** in the comparative and superlative

alt <i>old</i>	hart <i>hard</i>	kurz <i>short</i>	
arg <i>bad</i>	jung <i>young</i>	lang <i>long</i>	schwarz <i>black</i>
arm <i>poor</i>	kalt <i>cold</i>	rot <i>red</i>	stark <i>strong</i>
dumm <i>stupid</i>	klug <i>clever</i>	scharf <i>sharp</i>	warm <i>warm</i>
grob <i>coarse</i>	krank <i>sick</i>	schwach <i>weak</i>	

groß, *hoch* and *nah* also have *Umlaut* in the comparative and superlative, but they are otherwise irregular, see (b) above.

(ii) A few adjectives have **alternative forms with or without *Umlaut***

e.g. *nass* – *nässer/nasser* – *der nässeste/nassest e*. These are:

bang <i>scared</i>	gesund <i>healthy</i>	krumm <i>crooked</i>	
blass <i>pale</i>	glatt <i>smooth</i>	nass <i>wet</i>	zart <i>tender</i>
fromm <i>pious</i>	karg <i>sparse</i>	schmal <i>narrow</i>	

In general, the forms without *Umlaut* are more frequent in writing, whereas those with *Umlaut* are more typical of spoken German, especially in the South.

(d) Some adjectives add *-est* rather than *-st* in the superlative

In general, the vowel - *e* - can be understood as an aid to pronunciation.

(i) Those whose stem ends in - *haft*, - *s*, - *sk*, - *ß*, - *x* and - *z* always have - *est*

boshaft – der boshaft est e	süß – der süß est e
lieblos – der lieblos est e	fix – der fix est e
brüsk – der Brüsk est e	stolz – der stolz est e

(ii) Those with a stem ending in - *d*, - *t* and - *sc h* usually add - *est*

mild – der mild est e	berühmt – der berühmt est e
sanft – der sanft est e	rasch – der rasch est e

However, longer words in these consonants have the ending - *st* if the last syllable is unstressed:

spannend – der spannend ste	komisch – der komisch ste
------------------------------------	----------------------------------

(iii) Those with a stem ending in a long vowel or diphthong can have the ending - *est* or - *st*

früh – der früh **st e**/früh **est e** treu – der treu **st e**/treu **est e**

In practice, the ending *-est* is more frequent.

(iv) Other words whose root ends in a **consonant cluster** may have *-est*, e.g. *der schlankeste, der stumpfeste*, although the shorter ending *-st* is **more usual**, e.g. *der schlankste, der stumpfste*.

(e) Adjectives in *-el*, *-en*, *-er*

These can drop the *-e-* of the stem in the comparative, e.g.:

dunkel – dunkler – das dunkelste	bitter – bitt(e)rer – das bitterste
trocken – trock(e)ner – das trockenste	teuer – teurer – das teuerste

(i) Those in *-el* regularly drop the *-e-* of the stem

dunkel – dunk ler	edel – ed ler
--------------------------	----------------------

(ii) Those in *-en* and *-er* usually drop the *-e-* of the stem if they have an inflectional ending

trocken – der trock nere Wein	bitter – ein bitt rerer Geruch
--------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

If there is no ending, the *-e-* is usually kept in writing, although it is often dropped in speech:

Dieser Wein ist trock ener	Dieser Geruch war bitt erer
-----------------------------------	------------------------------------

The *-e-* is always dropped in the comparative of adjectives in *-er* if *-er* follows a diphthong:

teuer – Diese Tasche ist teu **rer** – die teu **rere** Tasche

(f) The comparative and superlative of compound adjectives

Compound adjectives are normally treated as single words and form their

comparative and superlative in the usual way. This is always the case with those written as a single word:

altmodisch <i>old-fashioned</i>	altmodisch er	das altmodisch st e
schwerwiegend <i>serious, weighty</i>	schwerwiegend er	das schwerwiegend st e
vielsagend <i>meaningful</i>	vielsagend er	das vielsagend st e
vielversprechend <i>promising</i>	vielversprechend er	das vielversprechend st e

However, if both parts are felt to retain their original meaning, they are written as separate words and only the first has the comparative or superlative form. The superlative has the form **am ... - ten**.

die dicht bevölkerte Stadt <i>the densely populated city</i>
die dichter bevölkerte Stadt
die am dichtesten bevölkerte Stadt
die leicht verdauliche Speise <i>the easily digested food</i>
die leichter verdauliche Speise
die am leichtesten verdauliche Speise

A few frequent idiomatic combinations have **superlative** forms which are written as single words:

der hoch gelegene Ort <i>the place situated high up</i>
ein höher gelegen er Ort
der höchstgelegene e Ort
nahe liegende Gründe <i>obvious reasons</i>
näher liegend e Gründe
nächstliegend e Gründe
die weit gehende Übereinstimmung <i>the far-reaching agreement</i>
die weiter gehende Übereinstimmung
die weitestgehende Übereinstimmung

Compound comparative forms of such adjectives with the suffixes *-er* or *-st* added to the second part (*weitgehender*, *das weitgehendste*) are not uncommon, and in practice there is much variation in usage with such forms and considerable uncertainty about which may be considered correct. A few frequent words have

alternative forms, in particular *schwerwiegend*, for which *schwerer wiegend* and *schwerstwiegend* are found as well as those given above.

(g) Seven adjectives denoting position only have comparative and/or superlative forms

das äußere <i>outer, external</i>	das äußerste <i>outermost, utmost</i>
das innere <i>inner, internal</i>	das innerste <i>innermost</i>
das obere <i>upper</i>	das oberste <i>uppermost</i>
das untere <i>lower</i>	das unterste <i>lowest, bottom</i>
das vordere <i>front</i>	das vorderste <i>foremost, front</i>
das hintere <i>back</i>	das hinterste <i>back(most)</i>
das mittlere <i>central, middle; medium</i>	das mittelste <i>central, middle</i>

These adjectives are only used attributively, i.e. before a noun:

seine äußere Erscheinung mit der äußersten Höflichkeit	seine innersten Gedanken in der vorderen, vordersten Reihe
---	---

As equivalents for English ‘external(ly)’ and ‘internal(ly)’ in other contexts, i.e. after *sein* or as adverbs, German uses *äußerlich* and *innerlich*:

Seine Verletzungen sind nicht äußerlich , sondern innerlich Sie blieb äußerlich / innerlich ganz ruhig

(h) The use of *mehr* and *meist* in comparison

A few adjectives form their comparative and superlative by means of a preceding *mehr* or *am meisten*. This is restricted to

(i) participles which are not normally used as adjectives:

Er verrichtet jetzt eine ihm mehr zusagend e Tätigkeit	<i>He is now performing a job which appeals to him more</i>
---	---

Dresden ist die durch den Krieg **am meisten zerstört** e deutsche Stadt

Dresden is the German city most completely destroyed in the war

(ii) a few adjectives which are only used in the predicate (like *zuwider*, see 6.3.1b):

Er ist mir noch **mehr zuwider** als
sein Bruder

*He is even more repugnant to me than
his brother*

(iii) some unusually long and complex adjectives like *bemitleidenswert*:

Er ist der **am meisten
bemitleidenswert** e Kranke

*He is the most to be pitied of all the
patients*

With past participles a prefixed *meist* - can be used rather than *am meisten*, e.g. *die meistzerstörte Stadt, der meistgekauft* Geschirrspülautomat Deutschlands.

mehr is also used if two qualities of the same object are being compared, i.e. in the sense ‘rather’: *Diese Arbeit ist mehr langweilig als schwierig*. *eher* is an alternative to *mehr* in this meaning in more formal registers.

6.5.2 The use of the comparative and other types of comparison

(a) The comparative particle in standard usage is *als*

This corresponds to English *than*:

Peter ist älter **als** Thomas

Mein Wagen ist schneller **als** deiner

(i) *wie* (or *als wie*) is very frequently used rather than *als* in (especially regional) colloquial speech.

e.g. *Peter ist älter (als) wie Thomas; Mein Wagen ist schneller (als) wie deiner*. This usage is generally considered incorrect in standard German.

(ii) The use of *denn* rather than *als* is archaic, although it can be used in formal registers to avoid the sequence *als als*:

Die Mauer erscheint eher als Kunstwerk	<i>The wall appears rather as a work</i>
denn als Grenze (Schneider)	<i>of art than as a frontier</i>

denn occurs in a few set phrases, especially *mehr denn je* ‘more than ever’.

(iii) Noun phrases after *als* are in apposition to the noun they refer to, i.e. they are normally in the same case, see 2.6.

(b) Degree of difference

i.e. a certain amount more. This is expressed by *um ... als*, or by a noun phrase in the accusative case:

Eine Fahrt im TGV-Atlantique kann um	<i>A journey on the TGV-Atlantique can</i>
bis zu 50 Prozent teurer kommen als in	<i>work out up to 50% more expensive</i>
einem herkömmlichen Schnellzug (FR)	<i>than in an ordinary express train</i>
Er ist (um) einen Monat jünger als ich	<i>He is a month younger than me</i>

(c) To express a greater degree *noch* is used with the comparative

i.e. the equivalent of English ‘even more’:

London ist eine noch schmutzigere Stadt	<i>London is an even dirtier city than</i>
als Amsterdam	<i>Amsterdam</i>
Oliver ist noch fauler als dein Bruder	<i>Oliver is even lazier than your</i>
	<i>brother</i>

(d) Lower degrees of comparison are expressed by *weniger*, *am wenigsten*

These correspond to English ‘less tall than’, ‘least tall’, etc.:

Er war weniger optimistisch als deine Tante der am wenigsten talentiert e Spieler	<i>He was less optimistic than your aunt the least talented player</i>
---	--

In practice, *am wenigsten* is felt to be awkward, and other constructions are often preferred. Compare:

die uninteressantest e Rede der billigst e/ preiswertest e Wagen die einfachst e Methode möglichst gering e Kosten	<i>the least interesting speech the least expensive car the least difficult method the least possible expenditure</i>
--	---

In formal registers, *minder* is an occasional alternative to *weniger*, e.g. *Nicht minder virtuos ist dagegen die Vorstellung auf der gegenüberliegenden Reeperbahnseite (HMP)*.

(e) The ‘absolute’ comparative

The comparative of some common adjectives is used not to signal a direct comparison, but to indicate a fair degree of the relevant quality, e.g. *ein älterer* Herr ‘an elderly gentleman’, *eine größere* Stadt ‘a fair-sized town’. This so-called ‘absolute’ comparative is possible with the following adjectives:

alt bekannt	dick dunkel	dünn groß	gut hell	jung klein	kurz lang	neu
eine bessere Wohngegend seit längerer Zeit ein neueres Modell	<i>a fairly good neighbourhood for a longish time now a fairly new model</i>					

(f) Progression is expressed by using *immer* with the comparative

This corresponds to English ‘more and more’:

Der Sprit wird **immer teurer**
Meine Arbeit wird **immer**
schwieriger

Petrol is getting dearer and dearer
My work is getting more and more
difficult

(g) Proportion (i.e. ‘the more ... the more’)

Proportion is expressed in German by using a subordinate clause introduced by the conjunction *je*, followed by a main clause beginning with *umso* or (especially in formal registers) *desto*:

Je älter er wird, desto/umso ärgerlicher wird er	<i>The older he gets, the more irritating he becomes</i>
je schneller der Wagen, desto/umso größer die Risiken	the faster the car, the greater the risks
Je besser das Wetter, desto/umso mehr können wir wandern	<i>The better the weather, the more we can go hiking</i>

(i) In older German, a second *je* could be used rather than *desto* or *umso*. This survives in a few set phrases such as *je länger, je lieber* and *je länger, je mehr*.

(ii) As an equivalent to ‘all the more because’, German uses *umso mehr*, *als/da/weil ...* (see 17.4.3b).

(iii) In colloquial German the combination *umso ... umso* is common, e.g. *umso größer, umso besser* ‘the bigger, the better’.

(h) Equality is expressed by **so ... wie**

This is the equivalent construction to English ‘as ... as’:

Peter ist so alt wie Thomas	Er ist nur halb so alt wie seine Schwester
---	--

(i) In colloquial German, *als* is occasionally used for *wie*:

Peter ist so alt als Thomas	Ich bin doch so groß als du
---	---

This is only regarded as acceptable in written registers in a few contexts:

- ‘as well as’ can be *sowohl wie* or *sowohl als* (see 17.1.4b), e.g. *Ich will sowohl Anna als/wie (auch) Helga einladen*
- ‘as soon/little as possible’ can be *so bald/wenig wie möglich* or *so bald/wenig als möglich*.
- ‘twice as ... as’ can be *doppelt so ... wie* or *doppelt so ... als*: *Die Ernte ist doppelt so groß als/ wie im vorigen Jahr*

The combination *als wie*, e.g. *Ich bin doch so groß als wie du* is common in speech, but it is universally considered to be a non-standard regionalism.

(ii) *so* can be omitted in some common phrases and idioms

Er ist (so) hart wie Stahl Er ist (so) schlau wie ein Fuchs

(iii) ‘just as ... (as)’ is expressed by *ebenso ... (wie)* or *genauso ... (wie)*:

Peter ist **ebenso** / **genauso** alt **wie** Thomas

Dort können wir **genauso** gutes Fleisch kaufen

(iv) *ebenso* is also used to indicate equivalence between two qualities:

Er ist **ebenso** fleißig wie geschickt *He is (just) as industrious as he is skillful*

(v) *nicht so sehr ... wie* is used for ‘not so much ... as’:

Er ist **nicht so sehr** dumm **wie** faul *He is not so much stupid as lazy*

(i) *gleich* can indicate equality with an adjective

Peter und Thomas sind **gleich** alt
Diese Städte sind etwa **gleich** groß

Peter and Thomas are the same age
These towns are about the same size

6.5.3 Types and uses of the superlative

(a) The superlative form *am ... sten*

The form of the superlative with the preposition **am** and the weak adjective ending - **en**, e.g. *schnell* – **am schnell sten**) is used primarily for adverbs, see 7.7.1a. However, it can be used adjectivally in the predicate of the verb **sein** beside the usual form of the superlative with a definite article, e.g.:

Welcher Junge ist am stärksten ? ~ Welcher Junge ist der stärkste ?

(i) If a noun is understood, either form can be used:

Diese Blume ist **die schönste/am schönsten**
Unter den deutschen Flüssen ist die Donau
der längste/am längsten

*This flower is the most
beautiful
Of the German rivers the
Danube is the longest*

(ii) If there is no noun to be understood, or if something is being compared with itself (= ‘at its most ...’), **only the form with *am*** can be used:

Ein Mercedes wäre **am teuersten**
Für meinen Geschmack ist eine Nelke
schöner als eine Tulpe, aber eine Rose ist
natürlich **am schönsten**
Hier ist die Donau **am tiefsten**
Der Garten ist **am schönsten** im Juni

*A Mercedes would be the
dearest
For my taste a carnation is
nicer than a tulip, but a rose
is the nicest
The Danube is (at its) deepest
here
The garden is (at its) nicest in
June*

(b) Any superlative can be used in an absolute sense

i.e. not as a comparison but in the sense ‘extremely’:

in höchster Erregung mit größter Mühe Es ist höchste Zeit, dass ... Es herrschte das rauheste Wetter Modernste Kureinrichtungen stehen zu Ihrer Verfügung (FAZ)	<i>in great excitement with the greatest difficulty It is high time that ... The weather was extremely raw You will have use of the most up-to- date spa treatments</i>
---	---

(c) A superlative adjective can be emphasized by prefixing *aller-*

This has the sense of the highest degree possible, e.g.:

der allerschnellste Wagen die allerbeste Lösung Zugleich ist jetzt wieder der Moment gekommen für eine der allerbritischsten aller britischen Sportarten: Snooker (NZZ)	<i>the fastest car of all the absolutely best solution At the same time the moment has now arrived again for what is surely one of the most British of British sports: snooker</i>
---	--

Adverbs

The traditional term **ADVERB** covers a range of words with a variety of uses. Typically, adverbs are words which **do not decline** and which express relations like **time**, **place** and **manner**. They can be used:

to qualify verbs: *Sie hat ihm **höflich** geantwortet*

to qualify adjectives: *ein **natürlich** eleganter Stil*

in relation to the sentence as a whole, e.g. *Er hat ihr **sicher** geholfen*

There is considerable disagreement about which words should be considered as adverbs in German and how they are best classified. In this chapter we use a simplified classification for practical purposes, and this is summarized in [Table 7.1](#).

[Table 7.1](#) Main types of adverb

Adverbs	Use	Examples
time place direction attitude/viewpoint reason/cause manner degree interrogative	<i>answering the question when</i> <i>answering the question where</i> <i>answering the question where to/from</i> <i>commenting on what is said, or</i> <i>answering a yes/no question</i> <i>answering the question why</i> <i>answering the question how</i> <i>answering the question how</i>	damals, lange, oft, gestern, heute hier, dort, oben, draußen, überall dahin, daher, hinüber, herein hoffentlich, leider, wahrscheinlich, natürlich, psychologisch dadurch, daher, deshalb, folglich, trotzdem irgendwie, anders,

	<i>much/small (often with adjectives) used to ask questions</i>	telefonisch sehr, außerordentlich, relativ, etwas, ziemlich wann?, weshalb?, wieso?
--	---	--

Phrases, often with a preposition, can have the same function as an adverb in a sentence. Compare:

Sie hat **heute** gearbeitet – Sie hat **den ganzen Tag** gearbeitet

Sie ist **trotzdem** gekommen – Sie ist **trotz des Regens** gekommen

Sie blieb **dort** – Sie blieb **in der alten Stadt am Rhein**

The term **ADVERBIAL** is used to refer both to single words and to phrases like the above (traditionally called **adverbial phrases**) which have the same function in a sentence. This chapter only deals with adverbs proper (i.e. single words) and concentrates on those adverbs of German and their uses which present significant differences to their most usual English equivalents:

- adverbs of **place** (section 7.1)
- adverbs of **direction** (section 7.2)
- adverbs of **time** (section 7.3)
- adverbs of **manner, viewpoint, attitude and reason** (section 7.4)
- adverbs of **degree** (section 7.5)
- interrogative **adverbs** (section 7.6)
- **comparative and superlative** forms of adverbs (section 7.7)

7.1 Adverbs of place

7.1.1 *hier, dort, da*

(a) *hier* refers to a place close to the speaker (= English ‘here’)

Ich habe deine Tasche **hier** im Schrank gefunden

(b) *dort* refers to a place away from the speaker (= English ‘there’)

Ich sah deine Schwester **dort** an der Ecke stehen

(c) *da* is a less emphatic alternative to *dort*

It is used more frequently than *dort* and usually refers to a place away from the speaker:

Ich sah ihn **da** an der Ecke stehen

da is sometimes used to point in a general, unemphatic way in contexts where the difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’ is not important. In contexts like these it can sometimes correspond to English ‘here’:

Herr Meyer ist momentan nicht da	<i>Mr Meyer is not here at the moment</i>
---	---

This usage is particularly common in the South, and universal in Austria.

7.1.2 *oben, unten*

German lacks noun equivalents for ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ and often uses phrases with *oben* and *unten* in contexts where these nouns would be used in English:

	<i>at the top of the tower</i>
oben auf dem Turm	She was standing right at the top of the
Sie stand ganz oben auf der Treppe	stairs
unten auf dem Bild	at the bottom of the picture
Bis unten sind es noch zwei Stunden	It’s another two hours’ walk to the
zu Fuß	bottom
Die Säule wird nach unten hin breiter	The column broadens out towards the
Sein Name steht unten auf der Liste	bottom
ganz unten im Kasten	His name is at the bottom of the list

auf Seite 90 **unten**
von **oben** bis **unten**

right at the bottom of the chest
at the bottom of page 90
from top to bottom

7.1.3 *mitten*

The adverb *mitten* is the most usual equivalent for the English nouns ‘middle’ or ‘midst’. It is usually followed by a preposition. In some contexts *mitten* can have other English equivalents:

Mitten im Garten ist ein Teich Sie stellte die Vase mitten auf den Tisch mitten in der Nacht mitten in der ganzen Aufregung Ich war mitten unter den Leuten auf der Straße Er bahnte sich einen Weg mitten durch die Menge mitten auf der Leiter	<i>In the middle of the garden there is a pond</i> She put the vase in the middle of the table in the middle of the night in the midst of all the excitement I was in the midst of the people in the street He forced his way through the middle of the crowd <i>halfway up/down the ladder</i>
--	--

7.1.4 *außen, draußen; innen, drinnen*

außen and *innen* mean ‘on the outside’, ‘on the inside’, i.e. they refer to the outer or inner surface of the object, whereas *draußen* and *drinnen* mean ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, i.e. away from the object or contained within it:

Die Tasse ist außen schmutzig Ich musste draußen warten Die Äpfel sind innen faul Drinnen ist es aber schön warm Dieses Fenster geht nach innen auf Wir kommen von draußen Er schloss die Tür von außen zu	<i>The cup is dirty on the outside</i> I had to wait outside The apples are rotten inside Indoors it's nice and warm, though This window opens inwards We are coming from outside He shut the door from the outside
---	---

von außen / innen gesehen

seen from the outside/inside

The use of *außen* and *innen* to mean ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ is now archaic or regional (especially Austrian).

7.1.5 Indefinite place adverbs

i.e. the equivalents of English ‘somewhere’, ‘anywhere’, ‘everywhere’, ‘nowhere’ and similar words and phrases.

(a) *irgendwo*

irgendwo corresponds to ‘somewhere’ or, in questions, ‘anywhere’:

Ich habe es wohl **irgendwo** liegen gelassen
Hast du Paula **irgendwo** gesehen?

I’ve probably left it somewhere
Have you seen Paula anywhere?

In spoken German simple *wo* is often used for *irgendwo* if unstressed: *Ich habe es wohl wo liegen gelassen.*

(b) *überall*

überall corresponds to ‘everywhere’, or to ‘anywhere’ in the sense of ‘no matter where’:

Erika hat dich **überall** gesucht
Sie dürfen hier **überall** parken

Erika was looking for you everywhere
You can park anywhere here

(c) *nirgendwo, nirgends*

nirgendwo and *nirgends* correspond to ‘nowhere’, ‘not ... anywhere’:

Er war **nirgendwo** / **nirgends** zu sehen
Ich habe dich gestern **nirgends** gesehen

He was nowhere to be seen
I didn't see you anywhere yesterday

(d) *anderswo, woanders*

anderswo and *woanders* correspond to 'somewhere else', 'elsewhere', or, in questions, 'anywhere else':

Sie müssen ihn **anderswo** / **woanders**
suchen

*You'll have to look for him somewhere
else*

Hast du ihn **anderswo** / **woanders**
gesehen?

*Have you seen him
somewhere/anywhere else?*

7.2 Adverbs of direction: *hin* and *her*

The adverbs *hin* and *her* indicate the direction of movement, most typically towards or away from the speaker, and German expresses this more consistently and more systematically than English. These adverbs have a wide range of uses and can occur alone or linked with another word, especially a preposition. In general, *hin* denotes **motion away from** the speaker (or the person concerned), while *her* denotes **motion towards** the speaker (or another point of reference).

7.2.1 *hin* and *her* compounded with adverbs of place

Direction adverbs are formed in German by compounding *hin* or *her* with adverbs indicating place, and these are used to differentiate consistently between **position**, **movement away from the speaker** and **movement towards the speaker**. This can be illustrated by the interrogative adverbs:

Wo wohnen Sie?
Wohin gehen Sie?

Where do you live?
Where are you going (to)?

Woher kommen Sie?

Where are you coming from?

In English we don't need to say 'Where are you going **to** ?' since 'to' can be left out. In German, though, we have to use *wo* **hin** ? to ask where someone is going or something is being put.

The other adverbs of place listed in section 7.1 can be compounded like this with - *hin* and - *her* to indicate direction to/from:

Sie wohnt **hier**
Sie kommt **hierher**
Leg das Paket **hierhin** !
Sie wohnt doch **da** / **dort**
In den Ferien fahren wir **dorthin** / **dahin**, wo
wir voriges Jahr waren
Sie kommt **dorthier**
Er stand **dort** an der Ecke
Wie wollen wir **dorthin** kommen?
Er geht heute Nachmittag **irgendwohin**
Sie geht **überallhin**
Morgen fahren wir **anderswohin**

She lives here
She's coming here
Put the parcel down here
She lives there, doesn't she?
In the holidays we're going where
we were last year
That's where she comes from
He was standing there on the
corner
How are we going to get there?
He's going somewhere this
afternoon
She goes everywhere
We're going somewhere else
tomorrow

wohin, *woher*, *dahin* and *daher* are often split, especially in spoken German, with *hin* and *her* being placed at the end of the clause (when they are written together with the verb, like a separable prefix):

Wo kommt deine Mutter **her** ?

Wo gehört dieses Buch **hin** ?

Da gehe ich praktisch nie **hin**

Da kommt er doch nicht **her**, oder?

ein kleines, gutes Restaurant, **wo** keine Amerikaner **hin** kamen (*Baum*)

(i) *von wo* and *von da/dort* are common alternatives in spoken German to *woher*, *daher/dorthier*:

Von wo kommt er? Er kommt **von da/dort**.

(ii) *dahin* is used with *sein* in the meaning ‘finished’, ‘lost’, e.g.:

Sein Leben ist **dahin**

Mein ganzes Geld war **dahin**.

(iii) If these words are not being used literally they cannot be split, e.g. *woher* in: **Woher** weißt du das? ‘How do you know that?’ and *daher* in the meaning ‘that is why’, e.g. **Daher** hat sie sich aufgeregt.

7.2.2 *hin* and *her* as verb prefixes

hin and *her* can be used with many verbs as separable prefixes (see 20.6).

(a) Used as prefixes, *hin* and *her* often indicate the direction of movement

In such contexts no specific word meaning ‘here’ or ‘there’ is needed, and the English equivalent can be idiomatic, especially if the verb itself does not primarily express movement:

Heute ist eine Wahlversammlung, und ich gehe hin	<i>There’s an election meeting today and I’m going there/to it</i>
Ich hielt ihm die Zeitung hin	I held out the newspaper to him
Ich hörte einen Ruf und sah hin	I heard a cry and looked over in that
Komm mal her !	direction
Gib den Schlüssel her !	Come here!
Er hat mich mit dem Auto her	Give me the key
gefahren	He drove me here
Halt den Teller her !	Hold out your plate
Setz dich her zu mir!	<i>Come and sit down over here by me</i>

(b) Some verbs with the prefixes *hin-* and *her-* have a derived, abstract or figurative meaning

sein Leben für etwas **hingeben**
 Das wird schon **hinhauen** (*coll.*)
 Nach dem Interview **war** ich völlig **hin**
 Die Burschen **fielen** über ihn **her**
 Das Thema **gibt** doch nicht viel **her**
 Es **ging** recht lustig **her**
 Sie hat ein Zimmer für ihn **hergerichtet**
 Mit der Qualität der Abiturienten **ist** es
 nicht mehr weit **her** (*Spiegel*)

to sacrifice one's life for sth.
 It'll be OK in the end
 After the interview I was shattered
 The youths attacked him
 There's not a lot to this topic, is
 there?
 It was good fun
 She got a room ready for him
The quality of school-leavers isn't
up to much any more

7.2.3 *hin* and *her* with a preceding prepositional phrase

(a) When used with a preceding prepositional phrase *hin* and *her* emphasize direction

In contexts like this they are typically optional:

Wir wanderten bis zu den Bergen (hin)	Er blickte zur Decke (hin)
Wir fuhren nach Süden (hin)	Er ging zum Fenster (hin)
Wir wanderten durch das Tal (hin)	Sie flogen über den Berg (hin)
Eine Stimme kam von oben (her)	Rings um ihn (her) tobte der Sturm

(b) *her* with *hinter*, *neben*, *vor* and *zwischen*

With these prepositions, *her* indicates movement in relation to another person or thing moving in the same direction. The noun is always in the dative case, see 18.3:

Er ging hinter ihr her	<i>He was walking behind her</i>
Der Hund lief neben mir her	The dog was running beside me
Ein deutscher Wagen fuhr vor ihm her	A German car was driving in front of him
Sie ging zwischen uns her	<i>She was walking between us</i>

The adverbs *hinterher* and *nebenher* are used in a similar sense, e.g. *Er lief hinterher, nebenher* ‘He was running behind, alongside’.

(c) Phrases with *auf* giving reasons or causes can be strengthened by *hin*

See also 18.3.5e:

Das tat er **auf** meinen Vorschlag **hin**
auf die Gefahr **hin**, erkannt zu werden

*He did that at my suggestion
at the risk of being recognized*

7.2.4 *hin-* and *her-* with prepositions form directional adverbs

e.g. *hinab*, *herab*, *hinauf*, *herbei*, etc. These are mainly used as separable verb prefixes, see 20.6. In general they link the direction indicated by the preposition with the notion **away from** or **towards** the speaker. However, in everyday speech, especially in North Germany, both *hin-* and *her-* are often reduced to *r-* in these compounds irrespective of the direction involved, e.g.:

Wollen wir jetzt **raus** gehen (written: *hinausgehen*)

Wollen wir die Jalousien **runter** lassen? (written: *herunterlassen*)

These forms are quite often used in writing to give the impression of informal colloquial speech, e.g. *Ich ging morgens Bahnhofstreppen **rauf** und **runter** und nachmittags Bahnhofstreppen **runter** und **rauf** (Böll).*

(a) Six prepositions indicating direction form pairs of compounds with *hin-* and *her-*

hinab, herab *down*
hinauf, herauf *up*

hinein, herein *in*
hinüber, herüber *over*

hinaus, heraus *out*

hinunter, herunter *down*

They are characteristically used in conjunction with a preceding prepositional phrase or a noun phrase in the accusative case (see 2.2.2b):

Wir stiegen die Treppe hinauf	Wir kamen die Treppe herab / herunter	<i>We climbed up the stairs</i>	<i>We came down the stairs</i>
Er ging in das Haus hinein	Er kam in das Zimmer herein	<i>He went into the house</i>	<i>He came into the room</i>

hinab / **herab** and **hinunter** / **herunter** have identical meanings. Those with *-unter* are more usual in spoken registers.

hinaus and **heraus** are used with a preceding phrase with **zu** to indicate movement or vision out of or through doors, windows etc., e.g.:

Er blickte **zur** Tür **hinaus**
Sie warf es **zum** Fenster **heraus**

He looked out (of) the door
She threw it out (of) the window

(b) Other prepositions or adverbs combine with only one of **hin-** or **her-**

With **hin** -: **hindurch** *through*
With **her** -: **heran** *along; up (to)*

hinweg *away*

herbei *along*

hinzu *in addition*

herum *round*

hervor *forth, out*

Er drang durch die Menge **hindurch**
Die Rollbahn sauste unter uns **hinweg**
Sie legte einige Papiere **hinzu**
Sie trat an den Tisch **heran**
Einige Polizisten kamen **herbei**
Er kam um die Ecke **herum**
Die Bücher lagen auf dem Tisch **herum**
Er zog einen Revolver unter dem Tisch **hervor**

He pushed through the crowd
The runway sped away beneath us
She put down some papers in addition
She stepped up to the table
A few policemen came along
He came round the corner
The books were lying around on the table
He pulled a revolver out from under the table

German used to make a distinction between **herum** ‘round in a circle’ and **umher** ‘criss-crossing; higgledy-piggledy’. Nowadays, though, **herum** is commonly used in both senses in both speech and writing.

(c) The adverb with *hin-* or *her-* often repeats the direction given by a previous preposition

Der Vogel flog **in** das Zimmer **hinein**
Wir kamen **aus** dem Wald **heraus**

Er kam **um** die Ecke **herum**
Sie gingen **durch** das Tal **hindurch**

These constructions can seem tautologous, but if the adverb is omitted, the effect is usually that the verb is emphasized rather than the direction. The adverb should thus be used **unless** the verb is to be stressed. Compare:

Der Vogel ist in das Zimmer **geflogen** (i.e. it flew rather than hopped)

Der Vogel ist in das Zimmer **hinein** geflogen (i.e. it didn't fly **out**)

Wir wollen die Truhe in dein Zimmer **tragen** (i.e. carry, not push)

Wir wollen die Truhe in dein Zimmer **hinüber** tragen (i.e. take it **across** – not up or down)

If another word in the sentence bears the main stress, the adverb is optional:

Der **Vogel** ist in das Zimmer (hinein)geflogen

Wir wollen die **Truhe** in dein Zimmer (hinüber)tragen

(d) Some verbs with *hin-* and *her-* compounds have figurative meanings

sich zu etwas **herablassen**
Er **gibt** eine Zeitschrift **heraus**
Es **kommt** auf dasselbe **heraus**
Er **leierte** die Predigt **herunter**
Die Verhandlungen **zogen sich hinaus**

to condescend to (do) sth.
He edits a journal
It all comes to the same thing
He reeled off the sermon
The negotiations dragged on

(e) Verbs with simple direction prefixes

ab -, **an** -, **auf** -, **aus** - etc. Because direction is indicated by using the compounds with *hin*- or *her*- verbs with simple prefixes usually have a derived, extended or other non-literal meaning (see also 20.6.1). Compare:

Er ist (in das Zimmer) hineingegangen	<i>He went in(to the room)</i>
Die Zeitung ist eingegangen	The newspaper went bust
Er hat den Koffer hereingebracht	He brought the suitcase in
Das bringt nichts ein	That's not worth it
Er kam (aus dem Haus) heraus	He came out (of the house)
Mit 100 Euro kommen wir nicht aus	We won't manage on 100 euros
Ich ging zu ihm hinüber	I went over to him
Er ist zur SPD übergegangen	<i>He went over to the SPD</i>

7.2.5 Other meanings and uses of *hin* and *her*

(i) **hin** - often has the sense 'down':

Sie legte sich hin	Der Junge fiel hin	Er setzte den Stuhl hin
---------------------------	---------------------------	--------------------------------

(ii) **vor sich hin** means 'to oneself' (see 18.3.16b):

Das murmelte er so vor sich hin	Sie las vor sich hin
--	-----------------------------

(iii) The combination **an... hin** (see 18.3.2a) means 'alongside'. The noun is in the dative case:

Der Weg führt an der Wiese hin	<i>The path goes along the meadow</i>
--	---------------------------------------

(iv) **von ... her** means 'in respect of':

Das war schon verfehlt **von** der Zielsetzung **her** (see 18.2.8a).

(v) **hin und her** means 'to and fro', 'back and forth':

Er ging auf der Straße **hin und her**

(vi) **hin und wieder** means ‘now and again’:

Hin und wieder sehe ich ihn in der Stadt

(vii) **her** is used in the sense of ‘ago’ in time phrases:

Das ist schon lange **her**

7.3 Adverbs of time

Adverbs of time can indicate a **point in time** (e.g. *damals*), **duration** (e.g. *lange*) or **frequency** (e.g. *oft*). A selection of commonly used German time adverbs is given in 7.3.1, listed in terms of these categories. Sections 7.3.2 – 7.3.5 explain some instances where German and English usage differs in respect to time adverbs.

7.3.1 Commonly used adverbs of time

Further information on some of these adverbs is given in other sections, as indicated. Note that the ‘present’ with time adverbs can sometimes be a point of reference in the past or future rather than the actual present moment.

(a) indicating a point in time

(i) referring to the present:

augenblicklich	<i>at the moment</i>	jetzt	<i>now</i>
derzeit	at present	momentan	at present
gegenwärtig	at present, currently	nun (9.1.24)	now
gleichzeitig	at the same time	vorerst	for the moment
heuer (S. Ger.)	this year	zugleich	at the same time
heute	today	zurzeit	<i>at present</i>
heutzutage	<i>nowadays</i>		

(ii) referring to the past (or ‘previously’):

früher	<i>formerly, previously</i>	soeben	<i>just (now)</i>
gerade	just (now)	unlängst	recently
gestern	yesterday	vorher	before(hand)
kürzlich	a short time ago	vorhin	just now
neuerdings, neulich	<i>recently</i>	zuvor	<i>before(hand)</i>

(iii) referring to the future (or ‘subsequently’):

augenblicklich	<i>at once</i>	gleich (9.1.16)	<i>at once</i>
bald	soon	morgen	tomorrow
danach	afterwards	nachher	after(wards)
darauf	after that	nächstens (7.2.2c)	shortly
daraufhin	after that	sofort, sogleich	at once, immediately
demnächst	very soon	später	later
einst	<i>some time (also past)</i>	vorher, zuvor	<i>before(hand)</i>

(b) indicating duration

	<i>up to now,</i> <i>hitherto</i>		
bisher,	meanwhile		
bislang	in future		
inzwischen	for a short	seither, seitdem	
künftig	time	solange	<i>since then</i>
kurz	for a long	unterdessen	meanwhile
lange	time	vorerst, vorläufig,	in the meantime
längst	for a long	vorübergehend	temporarily, for the time being,
(7.2.2b)	time	währenddem (<i>inf.</i>),	for the moment
mittlerweile	in the	währenddessen	meanwhile
momentan	meantime	zeitweilig	<i>temporarily</i>
nunmehr	for an		
(<i>elev.</i>)	instant		
	<i>from</i>		
	<i>now/then on</i>		

lang can be suffixed to other time words to indicate duration, e.g. *stundenlang*, *monatelang*, *jahrelang* ‘for hours, months, years (on end)’.

(c) indicating frequency

gelegentlich	<i>occasionally</i>	nie und nimmer	<i>never ever</i>
häufig	frequently	nochmals	again
immer	always	oft, öfters	often
irgendwann	sometime (or	selten	seldom, rarely
je	other)	ständig	continually
jederzeit	ever	stets	always
manchmal	at any time	unaufhörlich	incessantly
mehrmals	sometimes	wieder, wiederum	again
meistens	repeatedly	(<i>elev.</i>)	at times
nie, niemals, nimmer	mostly	zeitweise	from time to
(<i>lit.</i>)	<i>never</i>	zuweilen	time
		zwischen durch	<i>in between</i>
			<i>times</i>

7.3.2 *gestern*, *heute* and *morgen*

These are the equivalent of English ‘yesterday’, ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’, and they are used in compounds or in conjunction with words indicating periods of the day to give the equivalent of English ‘last night’, ‘this afternoon’, etc.:

gestern Morgen	<i>yesterday morning</i>
gestern Abend	<i>last night</i> (before bedtime)
vorgestern	<i>the day before yesterday</i>
heute Nacht	<i>tonight</i> (after bedtime), <i>last night</i> (after bedtime)
heute Morgen/heute früh	<i>this morning</i>
heute Vormittag	<i>this morning</i> (after breakfast)
heute Nachmittag	<i>this afternoon</i>
heute Abend	<i>this evening</i> , <i>tonight</i> (before bedtime)
morgen früh	<i>tomorrow morning</i>
morgen Vormittag	

übermorgen

*tomorrow morning (after breakfast)
the day after tomorrow*

7.3.3 German equivalents of English 'then'

(a) *damals* refers to past time

i.e. meaning 'at that time':

Sie war damals sehr arm	<i>She was very poor, then</i>
Er war damals Anfang sechzig	<i>At that time, he was in his early sixties</i>
Damals kam der Kaiser jeden Sommer nach Bad Ischl	<i>In those days the Emperor went to Bad Ischl every summer</i>

(b) *dann* is used for other meanings of 'then' referring to time

especially in the sense of 'after that' with a series of actions or events:

Dann ist er weggefahren	<i>Then he left</i>
Erst bist du an der Reihe, dann ich	<i>First it's your turn, then mine</i>
Wenn er dir schreibt, dann musst du es deiner Mutter sagen	<i>If he writes to you, then you'll have to tell your mother</i>
Und wenn sie kommt, was machst du dann ?	<i>And if she comes, what will you do then?</i>

dann is not used after a preposition, cf. *bis dahin* 'till then', 'by then', *seither*, *seitdem* 'since then', *von da an* 'from then on', *vorher*, *zuvor* 'before then' (see also 7.3.4a).

(c) To intensify a question, the German equivalent is *denn*

e.g. *Was ist **denn** daran so komisch?* See 9.1.6 for further details.

7.3.4 German equivalents for English 'before' and 'after'

(a) *vorher* and *zuvor* are the usual equivalents for English 'before'

Both can be used to refer to the past **or** the future:

Ich war ein Jahr vorher/zuvor da gewesen	<i>I had been there a year before</i>
Ich muss vorher/zuvor noch telefonieren	I've got to make a phone call before then
Er hatte uns am Tag vorher/zuvor besucht	He had been to visit us the day before <i>some time previously</i>
einige Zeit vorher/zuvor	

Referring to time up to the present moment, *früher* or *zuvor* is used, or, in a negative context, *noch*:

Sie hätten es mir früher/zuvor sagen sollen	<i>You ought to have told me before</i>
Ich habe sie nie zuvor/noch nie gesehen	<i>I've never seen her before</i>

(b) *danach* or *nachher* are the usual equivalents for English 'after(wards)'

danach implies some previous event or action, whilst *nachher* is more general:

Wir sind ins Kino gegangen, und danach/nachher haben wir zu Abend gegessen	<i>We went to the cinema, and afterwards we had dinner</i>
Der Wagen war danach/nachher nicht mehr fahrbereit	Afterwards the car was no longer in running order
Ich habe sie einen Monat danach/nachher gesehen	I saw her a month after(wards)/later
Das werde ich dir nachher erzählen	<i>I'll tell you that afterwards</i>

darauf is a frequent alternative to *danach* or *nachher* after words expressing a period of time:

Kurz **danach** /Kurz **nachher** /Kurz **darauf** habe
ich sie wieder gesehen
Am Tag **darauf/danach** sind wir ins Theater
gegangen

*I saw her a short time
after/shortly afterwards
The day after we went to the
theatre*

hinterher is also often used for ‘afterwards’, as is *im Nachhinein* in the sense of ‘in retrospect’:

Natürlich ist man hinterher immer klüger	<i>Of course you are always wiser afterwards</i>
Im Nachhinein war er enttäuscht über die Niederlage, aber mit seiner Mannschaft nicht unzufrieden (BrZ)	<i>Afterwards/In retrospect/Looking back he was disappointed at the defeat, but he was not dissatisfied with his team</i>

(c) *before* and *after* can also be used as prepositions and conjunctions in English

When *before* and *after* are used as **adverbs** they have the German equivalents outlined in (a) and (b) above. However, in English, *before* and *after* are also used as prepositions or conjunctions, and they then have different equivalents in German. **English learners need to be alert to these differences.**

(i) *before*:

- The German equivalent of *before* when used as a **preposition** is **vor** (followed by a noun in the dative case, see 18.3.14c):

in den Jahren **vor** dem ersten Weltkrieg *in the years before the First World War*

- The most frequent German equivalent of *before* when used as a **conjunction** is **bevor**, although *ehe* is also used in more formal registers, see 17.3.2:

Zwei Wochen, bevor er starb, ist er nach Würzburg gefahren	<i>Two weeks before he died he drove to Würzburg</i>
--	--

Vier Jahre lang lebte er in München, drei Jahre in Bremen, ehe er 1961 wieder in die USA ging (MM)	<i>He lived in Munich for four years, and three in Bremen before returning to the USA in 1961</i>
---	--

(ii) **after**

The German equivalent of **after** when used as a **preposition** is **nach** (followed by a noun in the dative case, see 18.2.6c):

in den Jahren **nach** dem Ersten Weltkrieg *in the years **after** the First World War*

- The German equivalent of **after** when used as a conjunction is **nachdem**, see 17.3.4:

Nachdem sie abgefahren war, fiel ihr ein, was sie vergessen hatte	<i>After she had driven off she realized what she had forgotten</i>
---	---

7.3.5 German equivalents for English ‘recent(ly)’

German has no single word with the range of meaning of English ‘recent(ly)’. The following are the main equivalents, and the choice depends on the precise meaning to be expressed:

vor kurzem/kürzlich unlängst/jüngst (<i>elev., S.</i> } Ger.)	<i>at a point in time not long ago</i>
neulich letztens (<i>elev.</i>) }	<i>at a point in time not long ago (but relevant to the present)</i>
neuerdings letzthin in letzter Zeit seit kurzem	<i>up to and including the present (sth. which started recently) recently (in the very recent past) latterly (over a period of time up to and including the present) not for very long (continuing to the present)</i>

All these words and phrases are adverbial, so they have to be used in paraphrases to give German equivalents for the English adjective 'recent', e.g.:

auf der kürzlich stattgefundenen Konferenz	<i>at the recent conference</i>
bei unserer Begegnung neulich	at our recent meeting
als er vor kurzem krank war	during his recent illness
eine erst kürzlich eingeführte Neuerung	a (very) recent innovation
sein neustes Buch	<i>his most recent book</i>

Some other equivalents:

bis vor kurzem	<i>until recently</i>
Ich habe ihn noch später gesehen als Sie	I have seen him more recently than you
Kurt hat sie zuletzt gesehen	<i>Kurt has seen her most recently / just recently</i>

The adjective *rezent* is close in meaning to English 'recent', but in practice it is only widely used at present in Austria and Switzerland, e.g. *im Lichte der rezenten Erfahrungen (Presse)* 'in the light of recent experience', and in specialist geological or biological contexts, e.g. *rezente Amphibien* 'recent (i.e. not prehistoric) amphibians'.

7.4 Adverbs of manner, viewpoint, attitude and reason

A large number of adverbs fall into these categories, or into related subgroups which are not dealt with individually. It is convenient to deal with them all together here.

7.4.1 Adverbs of manner and viewpoint

(a) Adverbs of manner typically answer the question *Wie?*

Wie ist sie gefahren?
Wie hat sie gesungen?
Wie hat er es gemacht?

Sie ist **schnell** gefahren
Sie hat **gut** gesungen
Er hat es **anders** gemacht

When they are used in a sentence with *nicht*, the *nicht* always refers specifically to the adverb:

Sie hat **nicht deutlich** gesprochen (she did speak, but not clearly)

Werder Bremen hat gestern Abend in Leverkusen **nicht gut** gespielt (they played, but not well)

(b) Adverbs of viewpoint indicate a context in which the statement is to be understood

They can be paraphrased by ‘seen from a ... point of view’ or ‘...-ly speaking’, e.g.:

Die Stadt liegt **verkehrsmäßig** ungünstig

(i.e. in terms of road and rail communications)

Finanziell war diese Entscheidung eine Katastrophe

(i.e. financially speaking)

Deutschland ist **wirtschaftlich** stärker geworden

(i.e. from an economic point of view)

(c) Most adjectives (and participles) can be used as adverbs

Most of these are in practice adverbs of manner or viewpoint. In English such adverbs are typically marked by the suffix ‘-ly’, but German has no such ending, and these words have exactly the same form whether they are being used as adjectives or adverbs. Compare:

Er hat die Sache **überraschend**
schnell erledigt
Ein Dokument zeigt doch, dass er
mäßigend und **bremsend** zu wirken

He settled the matter surprisingly quickly
A document shows nevertheless that he
tried to exercise a moderating and

versuchte (*Zeit*)

calming influence

An adverb qualifying an adjective before a noun is marked as such by having no ending. Compare:

ein **schön** geschnittener Schrank
ein **schöner**, geschnittener Schrank

a beautifully carved cupboard
a beautiful carved cupboard

This distinction is not always maintained in practice, see 6.1.3g.

These adjective-adverbs can be used very widely and flexibly in German, often with compounding, in a way which can lack direct equivalents in English, which often has a rather different way of expressing ideas like these:

Er hat mir **brieflich** mitgeteilt, dass er
anderer Meinung sei
Widerrechtlich geparkte Fahrzeuge
werden **kostenpflichtig** abgeschleppt
Das Mitbringen von Hunden ist
lebensmittelpolizeilich verboten

*He informed me by letter that he was of
a different opinion*
Illegally parked vehicles will be
removed at the owner's expense
*Bringing dogs (into the shop) is
forbidden by order of the food
inspectorate*

7.4.2 Adverbs of attitude

Adverbs of attitude express the speaker's comment on the content of the statement, i.e. whether he or she thinks it is probable, likely, welcome, well-known or the like. In many ways their function overlaps with that of the modal particles (see [Chapter 9](#)). Because they relate to the sentence as a whole they are often called *Satzadverbien* in German.

Anscheinend ist sie erst um sieben gekommen

(i.e. it appears to the speaker that she only arrived then)

Er fährt **leider** schon heute ab

(i.e. the speaker thinks it is unfortunate that he's going)

Natürlich / Selbstverständlich darfst du das machen

(i.e. the speaker's opinion is that it goes without saying)

Sie wird uns **sicher (lich)** helfen

(i.e. the speaker thinks that it is certain)

These adverbs of attitude have a number of characteristic features. In particular, although they can occur in a negative sentence, they cannot themselves be negated:

Sie kommen **hoffentlich** noch heute

(one can't say *nicht hoffentlich*)

Er fährt **leider** nicht weg

(*nicht leider* is not possible)

Sie ist **wahrscheinlich** nicht gekommen

(*nicht wahrscheinlich ...* does not make sense)

Unlike adverbs of manner, they cannot answer the question *Wie?*, but they **can** be used to answer a yes/no question:

Singt sie heute? Ja, **bestimmt** / **leider** / **vielleicht** / **zweifellos**, etc.

(None of these words can answer the question *Wie singt sie?*)

7.4.3 Adverbs of reason

A large group of adverbs indicate cause, circumstance, condition, purpose or reason. The most frequent members of this group are:

allenfalls *at most*

andernfalls

otherwise

dabei *at the same*

time

dadurch *thereby*

demnach *therefore*

demzufolge (formal) *therefore*

dennoch *nevertheless*

deshalb *therefore*

deswegen *therefore*

infolgedessen *consequently*

jedenfalls *in any case*

mithin (formal) *consequently*

nichtsdestoweniger

nevertheless

daher <i>therefore</i>	folglich <i>consequently</i>	somit <i>consequently</i>
dann <i>in that case</i>	gegebenenfalls <i>if necessary</i>	sonst <i>otherwise</i>
darum <i>therefore</i>	gleichwohl (formal)	trotzdem <i>nevertheless</i>
dazu <i>to that end</i>	<i>nevertheless</i>	

7.4.4 German adverbs for English verbs or clauses

Many German adverbs in this group have a verb or a subordinate clause construction as their only or most natural idiomatic English equivalent. The most frequent equivalent of English ‘to like’, for example, is to use the German adverb **gern** with *haben* or another verb, e.g. *Ich esse **gern** Käsekuchen* ‘I like cheesecake’; *Sie hat Ihren Lehrer ganz **gern*** ‘She quite likes her teacher’.

Using these adverbs appropriately can make a significant difference for English learners in speaking or writing idiomatic German, and some of the most useful are given below. Sometimes a construction with a verb is also possible in German, so that ‘It must be admitted that it isn’t easy’ could correspond to *Man muss zugeben, dass es nicht einfach ist* or to *Es ist freilich nicht einfach*, but in general, the equivalents with adverbs can sound more idiomatic and concise:

Das Problem ist allerdings schwierig	<i>I must admit that the problem is difficult</i>
Er wurde allmählich rot im Gesicht	<i>He began to get red in the face</i>
Er hat andauernd gespielt	<i>He kept on playing</i>
Er ist angeblich arbeitslos	<i>He claims to be unemployed</i>
Er ist anscheinend nicht gekommen	<i>It seems he didn’t come</i>
Wir können Ihnen	
bedauerlicherweise nicht weiter	<i>We regret that we can be of no further</i>
behilflich sein	<i>assistance to you</i>
Er ist bekanntlich ein hervorragender	<i>Everyone knows that he is an outstanding</i>
Linguist	<i>linguist</i>
Hier können Sie beliebig lange	<i>You can stay here as long as you like</i>
bleiben	<i>You’d better keep that to yourself</i>
Am besten behalten Sie das für sich	<i>I’m sure Thomas is coming with us /</i>
Thomas kommt bestimmt mit	<i>Thomas is sure to be coming with us</i>
Wir haben erfreulicherweise das	

Spiel gewonnen
Es ist **freilich** nicht einfach
Gegebenenfalls kann man auch eine
andere Taste wählen
Im Sommer spielt er **gern** Tennis
Dienstags hat er **gewöhnlich** Tennis
gespielt
Hoffentlich erreichen wir die Hütte
vor Sonnenuntergang

I'm glad to say that we won the game
It must be admitted that it isn't easy
If the need should arise , another key
may be selected
He likes playing tennis in summer
He used to play tennis on Tuesdays
I hope we shall reach the cabin before
sunset

Sie kann **leider** nicht kommen
Im Winter spielt er **lieber** Fußball
Ich habe Reiten **lieber** als Radfahren
Er kommt **möglicherweise** noch vor
dem Abendessen
Sie erschien **nicht**
Die Firma stellt diese Ersatzteile **nicht**
mehr her
Nimm dir **ruhig** noch etwas zu
trinken
Alle Insassen sind **vermutlich** ums
Leben gekommen
Er las **weiter**
Ich habe sie **zufällig** in der Stadt
gesehen
Zweifelloos wird auch dieses Jahr sehr
wenig Schnee im Allgäu fallen

I'm afraid she can't come
He prefers playing football in the winter
I prefer riding to cycling
It is possible that he will be coming before
dinner
She failed to appear
The company has ceased / stopped
making these spare parts
Don't be afraid to help yourself to
another drink
It is presumed that all the passengers lost
their lives
He continued to read/ went on reading
I happened / chanced to see her in town
There is no doubt that very little snow
will fall in the Allgäu this year either

7.4.5 *anders* and *sonst*

These two adverbs are very similar in meaning and both can be equivalents of English **else**. However, they are not always interchangeable.

(a) *anders* means 'else' or 'differently'

anders was originally the genitive of the adjective *ander*, see 5.5.2. It usually has the written form *anders* (very occasionally *anderes*), which differentiates it from the nominative/accusative singular neuter of *ander*, which is normally written *andres* or *anderes*. It is used as follows:

(i) In the meaning ‘else’ with *jemand* and *niemand*:

Es ist jemand anders gekommen	<i>Somebody else came</i>
Der Schirm gehört jemand anders	The umbrella belongs to somebody
Ich habe mit niemand anders	else
gesprochen	I didn’t talk to anybody else
Sie hat niemand anders als dich	<i>She wasn’t looking for anyone else but</i>
gesucht	<i>you</i>

In standard German, *anders* is invariable in combination with *jemand* and *niemand*, see 5.5.15b. In South German usage, though, inflected forms of *ander* often occur rather than invariable *anders*, especially in the accusative and dative, e.g. *jemand / niemand anderen*, *jemand / niemand anderem*.

(ii) *anders* is used in the meaning ‘else’ with *wo*, *wohin*, *woher*, (n)*irgendwo*. Note the various alternative combinations:

woanders/anderswo/irgendwo anders	<i>somewhere else / elsewhere</i>
nirgendwo anders	nowhere else
Ich gehe irgendwo anders	I’m going somewhere else
hin/woandershin/ anderswohin	He comes from somewhere else,
Er kommt anderswoher, nicht aus	not from Hamburg
Hamburg	<i>I’m not going anywhere else</i>
Ich gehe nirgendwo anders hin	

(iii) *anders* also means ‘different(ly)’, ‘in a different way’:

Er ist ganz anders als sein Bruder	
Du musst es irgendwie anders anpacken	<i>He is quite different to his brother</i>
Das klingt jetzt anders	You’ll have to tackle it differently
Compare:	That sounds different now
Es ist etwas anders	It is rather different

Es ist etwas **and(e)res**

It is something else

(b) *sonst* means ‘else’ or ‘otherwise’

(i) In some contexts *sonst* can overlap with the meaning of *anders* ‘else’ or *ander* ‘other’, ‘different’. Compare the following alternatives:

Kannst du etwas anderes vorschlagen? Kannst du sonst (noch) etwas vorschlagen?	}	<i>Can you suggest anything else?</i>
War noch jemand anders da? War sonst noch jemand da?	}	<i>Was anyone else here?</i>
Niemand anders hat mir geholfen Niemand sonst hat mir geholfen	}	<i>Nobody else helped me</i>
sonst (irgendwo) / irgendwo sonst / anderswo , etc. (see (a) above)	}	<i>somewhere/anywhere else</i>
Ich muss noch sonst wohin Ich muss anderswohin	}	<i>I’ve got to go somewhere else</i>
Wenn noch andere Probleme auftauchen Wenn sonst noch Probleme auftauchen	}	<i>If any other problems arise, ...</i>
Wer kann es sonst gesagt haben? (less usual: Wer anders kann es gesagt haben?)		<i>Who else can have said it?</i>

(ii) However, if the sense is clearly ‘different’ or ‘other’, only *ander* or, where appropriate, *anders*, can be used. Compare:

Da ist Professor Niebaum und niemand anders	<i>That’s Professor Niebaum and nobody else</i> (i.e. not a different person)
Da ist Professor Niebaum und sonst niemand	<i>That’s Professor Niebaum and nobody else</i> (i.e. he’s the only one there)

(iii) If the meaning is clearly ‘in addition’, ‘apart from that’, ‘otherwise’, then only *sonst* is possible:

Wer kommt **sonst** noch?
 Mit wem haben Sie **sonst** noch
 gesprochen?
 Was hat sie **sonst** noch gesagt?
sonst irgendwann
Sonst geht alles gut
 Wir müssen uns beeilen, **sonst**
 verpassen wir den Zug
 länger als **sonst**

Who else is coming?
 Who else did you talk to?
 What else did she say?
 some/any other time
 Otherwise all is well
 We'll have to hurry, otherwise we'll
 miss the train
longer than usual

7.4.6 Adverbs in -weise

The suffix *-weise* is very productive to form adverbs of manner or attitude.

(a) Adverbs formed from a noun or a verb + *weise*

These are typically manner adverbs, meaning 'by way of', 'in the form of':

andeutungsweise *by way of a hint*
 ausnahmsweise *by way of exception*
 beispielsweise *by way of example*
 beziehungsweise *or, as the case may be*
 (17.1.3b)
 bruchstückweise *in the form of*
fragments
 dutzendweise *by the dozens*
 familienweise *in families*
 gruppenweise *in groups*
 massenweise *on a massive scale*
 paarweise *in pairs*
 Die Flüchtlinge strömten **massenweise**
 über die Grenze
 Sein neues Buch ist **stellenweise** ganz
 gut
 Er wird **stundenweise** bezahlt

pfundweise *by the pound*
 probeweise *on approval*
 ruckweise *by jerks*
 schrittweise *step by step*
 stückweise *piecemeal*
 stundenweise *by the hour*
 teilweise *partly*
 versuchsweise *tentatively*
 zeitweise *temporarily*
 zwangsweise *compulsorily*
 The refugees were streaming **in hordes**
 across the border
 His new book is quite good **in places**
 He is paid **by the hour**

These forms were originally only adverbs, but they are increasingly being used as adjectives as well:

eine probeweise Anstellung	die teilweisen Verbesserungen
eine ruckweise Bewegung	eine stundenweise Bezahlung
der stückweise Verkauf	die stufenweisen Fortschritte
eine schrittweise Anhebung des Rentenalters auf 70 Jahre (HMP)	

However, this usage is only generally considered acceptable with nouns which denote a process, as in the examples above. It is by no means unknown for them to be used with other nouns, e.g. *der stückweise Preis* or *eine auszugsweise Urkunde*, but this is commonly regarded as incorrect.

(b) Adverbs in *-erweise*

Many adverbs of attitude are formed from adjectives or participles with the suffix *-weise* and the linking element *-er-*, e.g. *möglicherweise* from *möglich*, *bezeichnenderweise* from *bezeichnend*. Similarly:

bedauerlicherweise <i>regrettably</i>	liebenswürdigerweise <i>obligingly</i>
begreiflicherweise <i>understandably</i>	möglicherweise <i>possibly, perhaps</i>
dummerweise <i>foolishly</i>	natürlicherweise <i>of course</i>
erstaunlicherweise <i>astonishingly</i>	normalerweise <i>normally</i>
glücklicherweise <i>fortunately</i>	unglücklicherweise <i>unfortunately</i>
interessanterweise <i>interestingly</i>	unnötigerweise <i>unnecessarily</i>
komischerweise <i>funnily</i>	unvermuteterweise <i>unexpectedly</i>

As these are adverbs of **attitude**, indicating a comment by the speaker on the statement, their meaning is different from that of the adverb of **manner** from which they are derived, and also from that of the corresponding phrase with the preposition *auf* and the noun *Weise*. Compare:

Er war merkwürdig müde	<i>He was strangely tired</i>
Er war merkwürdigerweise müde	Strange to say, he was tired

Er war in merkwürdiger Weise müde	He was tired in an unusual way
Er hat vernünftig geantwortet	He replied sensibly
Er hat vernünftigerweise geantwortet	Sensibly enough, he replied
Er hat auf vernünftige Weise geantwortet	<i>He replied in a sensible way</i>

Adverbs in - *erweise* are **never** used as adjectives.

7.5 Adverbs of degree

7.5.1 Common adverbs of degree and their use

(a) Adverbs of degree typically emphasize, amplify or tone down another part of speech

They are sometimes called ‘intensifiers’, and they are most often used to modify adjectives or other adverbs. The following are the most frequent in German:

außerordentlich <i>extraordinarily</i>	genug <i>enough</i>	sehr (see 7.5.2) <i>very</i>
äußerst <i>extremely</i>	geradezu <i>virtually</i>	überaus <i>extremely</i>
beinahe <i>almost, nearly</i>	höchst <i>extremely,</i>	verhältnismäßig <i>relatively</i>
besonders <i>especially</i>	<i>highly</i>	völlig <i>completely</i>
durchaus <i>absolutely,</i>	kaum <i>hardly, scarcely</i>	vollkommen <i>completely</i>
<i>thoroughly</i>	mäßig <i>moderately</i>	wenig <i>little</i>
etwas <i>a little</i>	nahezu <i>virtually</i>	ziemlich <i>fairly</i>
fast <i>almost, nearly</i>	recht <i>really</i>	zu <i>too</i>
ganz <i>quite</i>	relativ <i>relatively</i>	

eine durchaus selbstkritische Einsicht	<i>a thoroughly self-critical understanding</i>
Der Kaffee ist etwas süß	The coffee is a little sweet
Er fährt schnell genug	He’s driving fast enough
Das ist geradezu lächerlich	That is little short of ridiculous

Die Suppe war nur mäßig warm	The soup was (only) moderately warm
eine nahezu optimale Lösung des Problems	a virtually optimal solution to the problem
Er arbeitet recht gut	He works really well
ein überaus ehrliches Geschäft	a thoroughly honest transaction
Dieser Schriftsteller ist wenig bekannt	<i>This author is little known</i>

This list is not exhaustive, and many more occur, especially in colloquial speech, e.g. *echt, enorm, irrsinnig, ungeheuer, unheimlich, verdammt*.

(b) Some adverbs of degree are used only or principally with adjectives in the comparative or superlative

The following are the most frequent in use:

bedeutend *significantly*: Die Donau ist **bedeutend** länger als der Rhein

beträchtlich *considerably*: Die Zugspitze ist **beträchtlich** höher als die anderen Gipfel in den bayrischen Alpen

denkbar *possible*: Sie hat den **denkbar** schlechtesten Eindruck gemacht

entschieden *decidedly*: Er hat **entschieden** schlechter gespielt als vor einem Jahr

viel *much*: Diese Schule ist **viel** größer als meine

weit *far*: Der Wagen ist **weit** schneller, als ich dachte

bei weitem (*by*) *far*: Er ist **bei weitem** besser als Jochen/der Beste in der Klasse

weitaus (*by*) *far*: Isabella ist **weitaus** reifer, als man ihrem Alter nach schließen dürfte Deutschland blieb natürlich auch der **weitaus** wichtigste Handelspartner der Schweiz (NZZ)

wesentlich *substantially*: Er hat heute **wesentlich** besser gespielt

(c) *hoch* ‘highly’

hoch can be used as an intensifier with some abstract adjectives. It is usually compounded with them: *hochempfindlich, hochfrequent, hochinteressant, hochgeschätzt, hochqualifiziert, hochwahrscheinlich*. The superlative form *höchst*

is used in the same way in a few cases, e.g. *höchstwahrscheinlich*.

(d) *lange* and *längst*

lange and *längst* are used before a negative to indicate a considerable difference in degree. In such contexts *lange* is often preceded by *noch*:

Das ist **noch lange nicht** gut genug
Dieses Buch ist **lange/längst nicht** so gut
wie sein letztes

That is not nearly good enough
This book isn't nearly as good as
his last one

7.5.2 *sehr*

sehr is chiefly used as an adverb of degree (= 'very'):

Sie weiß es **sehr** gut

Das ist **sehr** nett von dir

However, it has a wider range of use than English *very*.

(a) It can modify a verb or phrase, corresponding to English 'very much'

Ich bewundere sie **sehr**
Das ist **sehr** nach meinem
Geschmack

Er ist **sehr** dafür
Er hat sich **sehr**
verändert

Das interessiert mich
sehr

(b) After *so*, *wie* or *zu*, it can denote degree, like English 'much'

In these contexts *sehr* is used rather than *viel*:

Nicht **so sehr** die Handlung wie der Stil hat mich gefesselt

Wie sehr ich es bedaure, dass sie durchgefallen ist!

Er hat es sich **zu sehr** zu Herzen genommen

7.6 Interrogative adverbs

The German interrogative adverbs introduce questions and correspond to the English **wh** - words. They fall into similar groups to other adverbs:

(a) Time

wann?	<i>when?</i>	Wann kommt der Zug in Gelsenkirchen an?
bis wann?	<i>until when?, how long?</i>	Bis wann bleibt ihr hier?
seit wann?	<i>by when?</i>	Bis wann seid ihr damit fertig?
wie lange?	<i>since when?, how long?</i>	Seit wann spielen Sie Tennis?
wie oft?	<i>how long?</i>	Wie lange wollt ihr heute noch spielen?
	<i>how often?</i>	Wie oft fährt der Zug nach Putbus?

(b) Place and direction (see also 7.2.1)

wo?	<i>where?</i>	Wo steckt die Angelika jetzt?
wohin?	<i>where (to)?</i>	Wohin fahrt ihr heute?/ Wo fahrt ihr heute hin ?
woher?	<i>where</i>	Woher kommt der Wagen?/ Wo kommt der Wagen
von wo?	<i>from?</i>	her ?
(coll.)	<i>where</i>	Von wo kommt der Wagen?
	<i>from?</i>	

(c) Manner

wie?	<i>how?</i>	Wie habt ihr das nur gemacht?
------	-------------	--------------------------------------

(d) Reason

warum?	why?	Warum wollt ihr nicht gehen?
was? (<i>coll.</i>)	why?	Was rennst du denn so schnell? (see 5.3.3f)
wieso? (<i>coll.</i>)	why?	Wieso wollt ihr nicht gehen?
weshalb? (<i>formal</i>)	why?	Weshalb wollt ihr nicht gehen?
wozu?	what ... for?	Wozu benutzt man das?

These interrogative adverbs can also introduce indirect questions (see 14.4.4 and 17.2.2c), e.g.:

Er hat mich gefragt, **wann** ich morgen komme

Ich habe dir doch gesagt, **wie** man das macht

For the interrogative pronouns **was** and **wer**, see 5.3.3. For the interrogative determiner **welcher**, see 5.3.1.

7.7 Comparison of adverbs

Like adjectives (see section 6.5), adverbs which denote a quality or a quantity can have comparative and superlative forms, e.g.:

positive degree:	Karl redet laut	<i>Karl talks loudly</i>
comparative degree:	Erich redet lauter	<i>Erich talks louder</i>
superlative degree:	Konrad redet am lautesten	<i>Konrad talks the loudest</i>

7.7.1 Formation of the comparative and superlative of adverbs

(a) Regular formation of the comparative and superlative

- (i) The comparative is formed with the ending - **er** and is identical to the comparative of adjectives:

Vettel fährt aber schnell **er** Ute musste etwas langsam **er** sprechen

(ii) The superlative of adverbs is formed with the ending - **st**, as with adjectives, but it is always used with the preposition **am** and the weak adjective ending - **en** (see also 6.5.3a):

Vettel fährt am schnellsten	<i>Vettel drives fastest</i>
Von der Burg aus sieht man es am klarsten	You can see it most clearly from the castle
Am einfachsten steigst du in Innsbruck um	<i>The simplest is for you to change trains in Innsbruck</i>

(b) Irregularities in the formation of the comparative and superlative of adverbs

(i) Adjectives with irregular comparative and superlative forms have the same basic irregular forms if they can be used as adverbs, e.g:

Monika spielt gut – Eva spielt **besser** – Antje spielt **am besten**

Peter ist lange geblieben – Thomas ist **länger** geblieben – Klaus ist **am längsten** geblieben

(ii) A few adverbs have irregular comparative and superlative forms:

bald	eher		<i>soon</i>
gern	lieber	am ehest en	<i>willingly, gladly</i>
oft	öfter	am liebst en	often
viel	mehr	das meist e	<i>much, many</i>
wenig	wenig er / minder	das wenig st e/das mindeste	<i>little, few</i>

The adverb **oft** has no superlative form, and the nearest equivalent to English ‘most often’ is *am häufigsten* ‘most frequently’.

The comparative *öfter* can be used in an ‘absolute’ sense (see 6.5.2e), with

the meaning ‘fairly often’.

(iii) Notes on the use of the comparative and superlative forms of *viel* and *wenig*:

- **mehr** and **weniger** are adverbs, not adjectives, they do not have any endings even when used with a following noun, e.g. *Er hat **weniger** Geld als ich; Sie hat **mehr** Verstand als du.*
- **minder** is only used in formal written German. It is only used to qualify adjectives, most commonly with a preceding *nicht*, e.g. *Anderswo zwischen Ostsee und Erzgebirge ist die Lage der Denkmalpflege nicht **minder** prekär. (Spiegel)*
- **mindest** can be used for ‘least’ in the sense ‘slightest’ but its use is restricted to formal registers: *Er hatte nicht die **mindesten** Aussichten zu gewinnen.*
- **nichts weniger als** normally means ‘anything but’, i.e. the same as *alles andere als*, e.g. *Er ist **nichts weniger als** klug* ‘He is anything but clever’. For English ‘nothing less than’, German often uses a positive statement: *Das ist **wirklich** katastrophal* ‘That is nothing less than catastrophic’. However, some Germans are now using *nichts weniger als* in the sense of ‘nothing less than’, and ambiguity is possible.

7.7.2 Other superlative forms of adverbs

(a) Absolute adverbial superlatives can be formed in *aufs ...ste*

e.g. ***aufs einfach ste**, aufs genau este*, etc. The form can be spelled with a small or a capital letter: *aufs einfachste/aufs Einfachste* (see 21.2.1). The preposition and definite article can be written out in full if emphasis is needed: *auf das einfachste/Einfachste*. This form is common in formal writing:

Der große runde Tisch war **aufs festlichste/
Festlichste** geschmückt (*Dürrenmatt*)

*The large round table was
decorated in a most festive way*

Herr Naumann war aufs äußerste/Äußerste gereizt (MM)	Mr Naumann was exceedingly irritated
Lange Zeit hat der Ministerpräsident jeden Verdacht auf das heftigste/Heftigste dementiert	<i>For a long time the Prime Minister denied all suspicions most vehemently</i>

(b) Adverbial superlatives in *-st*

These consist simply of the superlative stem, whether regular or irregular. Some are in common use in speech and writing, often with special meanings:

äußerst <i>extremely</i>	meist <i>mostly</i>
höchst <i>highly, extremely</i>	möglichst <i>as ... as possible; if at all possible</i>
jüngst (elev.) <i>recently</i>	unlängst <i>recently</i>
längst <i>for a long time, a long time ago</i>	The situation is highly problematic
Die Situation ist höchst problematisch	He died a long time ago
Er ist längst gestorben	You must make the best possible impression
Du musst einen möglichst guten Eindruck machen	<i>She got back recently</i>
Sie ist unlängst zurückgekehrt	

The following are typically used in formulaic idioms in formal registers:

eiligst <i>as quickly as possible</i>	höflichst <i>respectfully</i>
freundlichst <i>friendly</i>	schleunigst <i>as promptly as possible</i>
gefälligst, gütigst <i>kindly</i>	sorgfältigst <i>most carefully</i>
herzlichst <i>most cordially</i>	tunlichst <i>absolutely</i>
Ich danke Ihnen herzlichst	I thank you most cordially
Sie werden höflichst gebeten, diesen Irrtum ohne Verzug zu berichtigen	You are respectfully requested to rectify this mistake without delay
Wir machten uns schleunigst aus dem Staube (Dönhoff)	We quickly got up off the floor
Jeder Lärm ist tunlichst zu vermeiden	<i>Any noise is absolutely to be avoided</i>

New formations in *-st* are quite frequent, especially in journalism, where their

conciseness can be exploited:

Die Böhmendeutschen sind nicht ausgesiedelt, sondern brutalst vertrieben worden (<i>Presse</i>)	<i>The Germans of Bohemia were not resettled, but driven out in the most brutal fashion</i>
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Some forms in - *st*, i.e. *best-*, *größt-*, *höchst-*, *kleinst-*, *kürzest-* can be compounded with *möglich* to mean ‘the best possible’, etc.:

die bestmöglich e Lösung der größtmöglich e Schaden	die kleinstmöglich e Summe der kürzestmöglich e Weg
--	--

(c) Adverbial superlatives in *-stens*

These forms typically have special idiomatic meanings:

bestens <i>very well</i>	schnellstens <i>as quickly as possible</i>
frühestens <i>at the earliest</i>	spätestens <i>at the latest</i>
höchstens <i>at the most</i>	strengstens <i>strictly</i>
meistens <i>mostly</i>	wärmstens <i>most warmly</i>
mindestens <i>at least</i>	wenigstens <i>at least</i>
nächstens <i>shortly, soon</i>	At most thirty guests are coming
Es kommen höchstens dreißig Gäste	I mostly get up early
Ich stehe meistens früh auf	I need at least three thousand euros
Ich brauche mindestens dreitausend Euro	for this trip
für diese Reise	We’ll arrive at six at the latest
Wir kommen spätestens um sechs an	Smoking is strictly prohibited
Rauchen ist strengstens verboten	<i>He might at least ring up</i>
Er könnte wenigstens anrufen	

wenigstens and *mindestens* are often interchangeable, but *mindestens* emphasizes the idea of the absolute minimum possible rather more strongly. It is used less often when no actual figure is mentioned, in which case *zumindest* (see (c) below) is a possible, rather more emphatic alternative to *wenigstens*.

(d) Adverbial superlatives in *zu- ... -st*

Only a few of these are in current use, all with idiomatic meanings:

zumindest <i>at (the very) least</i>	zutiefst <i>(very) deeply</i>
zunächst <i>at first, in the first place</i>	zuvorderst <i>(right) at the front</i>
zuoberst <i>(right) on top</i>	He could at least have said hello to us
Er hätte uns zumindest grüßen können	The offer looked attractive at first
Das Angebot sah zunächst verlockend	She took the book which was lying on
aus	top
Sie nahm das Buch, das zuoberst lag	<i>The accused deeply regrets his</i>
Der Angeklagte bereut sein	<i>inappropriate behaviour</i>
Fehlverhalten zutiefst (NUZ)	

Numerals

This chapter deals with words for NUMBERS and NUMERALS in German and their associated forms and uses:

- **Cardinal numbers**, such as ‘one’, ‘two’, ‘three’, etc. (section 8.1)
- **Ordinal numbers**, such as ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’, etc. (section 8.2)
- **Fractions and decimals** (section 8.3)
- **Other numerical usages** (section 8.4)
- **Times and dates** (section 8.5)
- **Addresses** (section 8.6)

8.1 Cardinal numbers

CARDINAL NUMBERS are the numerals used in counting. [Table 8.1](#) illustrates the most important forms, and the rest of this section provides further information on these.

[Table 8.1](#) The forms of the cardinal numbers

0 null	10 zehn	20 zwanzig	30 dreißig
1 eins	11 elf	21 einundzwanzig	40 vierzig
2 zwei	12 zwölf	22 zweiundzwanzig	50 fünfzig
3 drei	13 dreizehn	23 dreiundzwanzig	60 sechzig
4 vier	14 vierzehn	24 vierundzwanzig	70 siebzig
5 fünf	15 fünfzehn	25 fünfundzwanzig	80 achtzig
6 sechs	16 sechzehn	26 sechsundzwanzig	90 neunzig

7 sieben	17 siebzehn	27 siebenundzwanzig	91 einundneunzig
8 acht	18 achtzehn	28 achtundzwanzig	92 zweiundneunzig
9 neun	19 neunzehn	29 neunundzwanzig	93 dreiundneunzig
100 (ein)hundert		1000 (ein)tausend	
101 hundert(und)eins		1099 tausend(und)neunundneunzig	
102 hundertzwei		1100 (ein)tausendeinhundert/elfhundert	
151 (ein)hunderteinundfünfzig		2305 zweitausenddreihundertfünf	
200 zweihundert		10 000 zehntausend	
535 fünfhundertfünfunddreißig		50 000 fünfzigtausend	
999 neunhundertneunundneunzig		100 000 hunderttausend	
564 297 fünfhundertvierundsechzigtausendzweihundertsiebenundneunzig			
1 000 000 eine Million		1 000 000 000 eine Milliarde	
2 000 000 zwei Millionen		1 000 000 000 000 eine Billion	
5 276 423 fünf Millionen			
zweihundertsechssundsiebzigttausendvierhundertdreiundzwanzig			

8.1.1 Spoken and written forms of the cardinal numbers

(a) Long numbers are rarely written out in full

i.e. those with more than one element, like *zweiunddreißig*, *hundertzwanzig*. In practice, complex numbers are rarely written fully except on cheques, and, in general, figures are used in written German more often than is usual in English.

(b) Numbers higher than a thousand

These can be given with **spaces** every three digits, i.e. *564 297*, or with a **point**, e.g. *564.297*. This is quite different to English or American practice and needs to be carefully noted to avoid confusion, especially as a comma is used in German rather than a point to indicate decimals, see 8.3.1d.

(c) *hundert* or *einhundert*; *tausend* or *eintausend*?

English learners tend to overuse the longer form *ehundert* because of the similarity to English ‘a hundred’. However, it is used less frequently than the shorter alternative *hundert*, and the long form *eintausend* is much less usual than simple *tausend*. However, *ein* is normally inserted in complex numbers, e.g. 101 *hundert ein tausend ein hundert*.

(d) *und* can be used between *hundert* and *eins*

However, English speakers tend to overuse this, because of the similarity to English ‘a hundred **and** one’. Nevertheless, *und* is optional (and less frequent in practice), as in *hundert(und)eins*, *zweihundert(und)eins*, as also between *tausend* and tens or units, e.g. *tausend(und)eins*, *viertausend(und)elf*, *zwanzigtausend(und)zweiunddreißig*.

(e) *eine Million*, *eine Milliarde* and *eine Billion* are nouns

They thus have a plural ending where necessary, e.g. *zwei Million en*; *fünf Million en vierhunderttausend*. Numbers higher than *eine Milliarde* are rare in normal use, so that, for instance, *tausend Milliarden* is more usual than *eine Billion*.

English speakers should note that *Milliarde* is the equivalent of what is nowadays usually referred to as ‘billion’ in British and (especially) American usage, i.e. a thousand million, whereas the rarely used German *Billion* is a million million.

The plural form is used when **one** million is followed by a decimal: *1,4 Millionen Euro*. This is spoken as *einskommavier Millionen Euro*.

(f) *zwo* is often heard for *zwei*

This otherwise archaic form is used to avoid confusion with *drei*, especially on the telephone. However, it has become common in other spoken contexts and is

sometimes extended to *2* in complex numbers, e.g. *zwo unddreißig*, and the ordinal *der zwo te*.

(g) The numbers from 2 to 12 have alternative forms with an additional -e

e.g. *sechs e*, *neun e*, *elf e*. These are common in colloquial speech (especially in the South) for emphasis, particularly when stating the time: *Ich bin um fünfe aufgestanden*, and in counting scores in card games.

(h) Longer numbers are often stated in pairs

e.g. 4711 (a brand of eau de Cologne), spoken *siebenundvierzig elf*. This usage is not uncommon with telephone numbers, although it is very much a matter of individual preference. Thus, a number like (0621) 54 87 23 can be given as *null sechs zwo eins – vierundfünfzig siebenundachtzig dreiundzwanzig*.

(i) Usage with years

The years from 1100 to 1999 are usually stated in hundreds in a similar way to English, so that 1996 will usually be given as *neunzehnhundertsechsendneunzig*.

However, years since the millennium are given with *zweitausend*, so that, for example, 2009 is *zweitausendneun* and 2015 is *zweitausendfünfzehn*. This differs from English, where using ‘twenty’ has become established.

(j) Using *beide* for English ‘two’

beide is often used where English uses the numeral ‘two’. This is particularly the case where it is a question of ‘two and only two’ of the relevant items, see 5.5.3b, e.g. *Ich möchte diese beiden Hemden kaufen* ‘I would like to buy these two shirts’.

(k) *fünfzehn* and *fünfzig*

These are often pronounced *fuff zehn* and *fuff zig* in colloquial speech.

(l) Colloquial German *zig*

Colloquial German uses *zig* to indicate an indefinite large number, corresponding to English ‘umpteen’:

Ich kenne sie schon zig Jahre	<i>I’ve known her umpteen years</i>
Die ist mit zig Sachen in die Kurve gefahren	<i>She took the bend at a fair old speed</i>

The compounds *zig mal* ‘umpteen times’, *zig tausend* ‘umpteen thousand’, etc. are also frequently used. These forms are sometimes seen written with an initial hyphen: *-zig*, *- zigmal*, etc., but this is not considered correct.

(m) Cardinal numbers used as nouns

If these refer to the numeral, they are feminine (see 1.1.5d) and have a plural in *-en* if required:

Die Sieben ist eine Glückszahl	In Mathe habe ich nie eine Fünf
Im Abitur hat er drei Zweien und eine Eins	gehabt
gekriegt	Die Hundert ist eine dreistellige Zahl

The feminine nouns ***die** Hundert* and ***die** Tausend*, referring to the numbers as such, are to be distinguished from the neuters ***das** Hundert* and ***das** Tausend*, which refer to quantities (see 8.1.5b).

(n) The numeral 7 is usually written in handwriting with a stroke

i.e. 7. This helps to distinguish it from 1, which Germans always write with an

initial sweep, i.e. 1.

8.1.2 *eins, ein, einer* ‘one’

(a) The form *eins* is used in isolation as a numeral

i.e. in counting and the like:

Wir müssen mit der (Linie) eins zum	<i>We've got to take the number one</i>
Bahnhof fahren	(i.e. tram, bus) <i>to the station</i>

This form is also used with decimals (see 8.3.1d): *einskommasieben*

(b) The form *ein* is used with a following noun

It agrees with the following noun for case and gender and has the same endings as the indefinite article, see [Table 4.3](#):

ein Tisch	<i>one table</i>
eine Kirche	one church
ein Buch	one book
durch einen Fehler	by one mistake
aus einem Grund	<i>for one reason</i>

The **numerical** sense of *ein* (i.e. ‘one’) is distinguished from the **indefinite article** *ein* (i.e. ‘a, an’) in speech by always being pronounced in full, see 4.1.2b. In writing, if there is a possibility of ambiguity in context, the numerical sense can be made clear typographically, although in practice this is quite rare, e.g.:

éin Buch *ein* Buch ein Buch **ein** Buch

After *hundert* and *tausend*, e.g. 301, 2001, there is considerable uncertainty as to how or whether to decline forms of *ein*.

One possibility is to use a **declined form of - *ein*** with a **singular** noun, e.g. *ein Buch mit dreihundertundeiner Seite*. The combinations *hundertundeine Mark* and *Tausendundeine Nacht* ‘The 1001 Nights’ are well established idiomatically.

Many Germans feel this sounds odd, and use the alternative of **undeclined - *ein***, with a **plural** noun, e.g. *ein Buch mit dreihundertein Seiten*.

As this can sound rather strange, too, a further alternative, using the **invariant** form - ***eins*** with a **plural** noun, is increasingly preferred, e.g. *ein Buch mit dreihundertundeins Seiten*; *Wir haben hundertundeins tolle Ideen*.

(c) The form *einer* is used as a pronoun

Its declension is given in [Table 5.11](#).

einer der Männer <i>one of the men</i>	ein(e)s der Häuser <i>one of the houses</i>
---	--

Wir haben einen Schäferhund, und ihr habt auch **einen**, nicht?

More details on the pronoun *einer* are given in 5.5.4.

(d) After a determiner, *ein-* declines like an adjective

e.g. ***der eine*** ... , ‘the one ...’

Das Dorf hatte bloß **die eine** Straße Mit **seinem einen** Auge sieht er schlecht

(e) *ein* has no ending in a few constructions

(i) When followed by ***oder*** or ***bis*** and **another number**, e.g. *ein oder zwei*, *ein bis zwei*:

Ich pflückte ein oder zwei Rosen	Wir mussten ein bis zwei Tage warten
Er kam vor ein oder zwei Wochen	Ich sprach mit ein oder zwei anderen

(ii) When followed by **andere** or **derselbe**, the alternatives of declining *ein* or leaving it endingless are equally acceptable:

Ein(er) oder der andere machte eine kurze Bemerkung	<i>One or other made a brief remark</i>
An ein(em) und demselben Tag machten drei Firmen Pleite	<i>On one and the same day three firms went bankrupt</i>

Followed by **mehrere**, *ein* is more commonly inflected: *vor einem* (rarely: *ein*) *oder mehreren Monaten* ‘one or more months ago’.

(iii) *ein* is not inflected in *ein Uhr* ‘one o’clock’, see [Table 8.3](#). (Compare *eine Uhr* ‘a/one clock’)

8.1.3 Declension of cardinal numbers

Apart from *ein* ‘one’ (see 8.1.2), cardinal numbers do not usually decline to show case or gender in German. Thus:

gegen sechs Kinder mit sechs Kindern wegen sechs Kindern	die sechs Kinder mit den sechs Kindern wegen der sechs Kinder
--	---

However, there are one or two special contexts where numbers can have endings to show case.

(a) *zwei* and *drei* can have the genitive forms *zweier* and *dreier*

These forms are only used in formal writing, and although they are quite frequent there, their use is wholly optional, e.g.:

Der Taufe zweier Kinder aus der Ehe stimmte er zu (MM)	<i>He agreed to the baptism of two children of the marriage</i>
die vielerlei Eindrücke dreier anstrengender Tage (Zeit)	<i>the various impressions from three strenuous days</i>

A following adjective has the strong ending *-er* (see 6.1.3a), as in the second example above, but an adjective used as a noun usually has the weak ending *-en*: *die Seligkeit zweier **Verliebten***. In less formal registers a phrase with *von* is always used, e.g. *die Eindrücke von drei anstrengenden Tagen*, and in practice this is also an acceptable alternative in formal writing.

(b) The numbers from 2 to 12 can have a dative in *-en* when used in isolation

i.e. when no noun follows:

Nur einer von **zweien** ist als gesund zu bezeichnen (*Zeit*)

als sich die Tür hinter den **dreien** geschlossen hatte (*Welt*)

Using the form with an ending is optional, but it is quite common, even in spoken German, especially with the numbers 2, 3 and 4.

It is most frequent for added emphasis and in set phrases such as *auf allen vieren* ‘on all fours’, *mit dreien* ‘with three (Jacks)’ (in the card game *Skat*), and in the formula *zu zweien, dreien, vieren*, etc. ‘in twos, threes, fours’, e.g. *dieser Spaziergang zu zweien*.

A rather more frequent alternative to express ‘in twos, threes, fours’, etc. is to use the preposition *zu* with a form of the numeral in *-t* (i.e. using the stem of the ordinal, see 8.2.1), e.g. *zu zweit, zu dritt, zu viert*. A distinction is sometimes made between *zu zweien* ‘in pairs’ and *zu zweit* ‘as a pair’ (i.e. when there are only two). Compare:

Sie gingen **zu zweien** über die Straße *They crossed the road in pairs*

Sie gingen **zu zweit** über die Straße *The two of them crossed the road together*

However, this distinction is not always upheld consistently.

8.1.4 Adjectives from cardinal numbers

Adjectives can be formed from cardinal numbers with the suffix *-er*, e.g. *fünf er*, *zehn er*. This form is used to denote value and measurement, or with reference to years. When they are used as adjectives, they do not decline (see 6.1.3g). When they are used as nouns, they have the ending *-n* in the dative case:

Ich habe zwei Zehner und einen Hunderter zwei Fünziger zehn achtziger Marken eine Achtziger die Zehner und die Einer eine Sechserpackung in den neunziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts ein Mann in den Vierzigern eine Mittfünfzigerin ein Dreitausender ein vierundneunziger Heppenheimer Krötenbrunnen	<i>I've got two ten euro notes and a hundred euro note two fifty cent pieces or two fifty euro notes ten 80 cent stamps an 80 cent stamp tens and units a six-pack in the 1990s a man in his forties a woman in her mid-fifties a mountain (over) 3000 metres high a '94 Heppenheimer Krötenbrunnen (i.e. a wine vintage 1994)</i>
--	--

8.1.5 *hundert, tausend, Dutzend*

(a) *hundert* and *tausend* are not declined when they are used as numerals

hundert, zweihundert Häuser tausend Bücher, sechstausend Bücher	<i>a hundred, two hundred houses a thousand books, six thousand books</i>
--	---

(b) *das Hundert*, *das Tausend* and *das Dutzend* are used as nouns of quantity

das zweite Dutzend, Hundert, Tausend	<i>the second dozen, hundred, thousand</i>
--------------------------------------	--

ein halbes Dutzend , ein halbes Hundert zwei Dutzend Eier Hunderttausende von Menschen Die Menschen verhungerten zu Hunderten und Tausenden	<i>half a dozen, half a hundred (i.e. fifty) two dozen eggs hundreds of thousands of people People were starving in hundreds and thousands</i>
---	--

(c) These words can be used to refer to an indefinite quantity

i.e. to indicate a rough approximation. In this usage, especially when they are used in the plural after quantifiers such as *einige, mehrere, viele*, etc., they can be spelled with an initial capital or small letter. They have a plural ending if the following phrase is introduced by *von* or is in the genitive (see 2.7.3):

In dem Stadion warten Tausende / tausende von Menschen auf den Spielbeginn Mehrere Hundert / hundert Kinder waren an Typhus gestorben Diesen Stoff verkauft man in einigen Dutzend / dutzend Farben	<i>In the stadium thousands of people are waiting for the match to start Several hundred children had died of typhus This material is sold in a few dozen shades</i>
---	--

In the genitive plural, they have the ending *-er* if no determiner precedes. A following adjective has the strong endings:

inmitten Tausender/tausender fröhlicher New Yorker (HMP)	<i>in the midst of thousands of happy New Yorkers</i>
---	---

However, they have the ending *-e* if a preceding determiner has the genitive plural ending *-er*: *die Ersparnisse vieler Tausend e /tausend e*.

Dutzend does not take a plural ending when used as a measurement noun in constructions such as *drei Dutzend (Eier)* ‘three dozen (eggs)’, see 1.2.8. For the use of the genitive, apposition or a phrase with *von* after the nouns *Dutzend*, *Hundert*, *Tausend*, see 2.7.3.

8.1.6 Qualification of cardinal numbers

Numerals may be modified by certain adverbs of degree

bis zu <i>up to</i> unter <i>under</i>	knapp <i>barely</i> zwischen <i>between</i>	über <i>over</i>
gegen, rund, um, ungefähr, circa/zirka (<i>abbrev.: ca.</i>) <i>about, approximately</i>		

Although some of these adverbs look like prepositions which would usually be followed by a noun in the accusative or dative case, when they are used in these constructions with a following numeral they have no influence on the case of the following noun phrase:

Bis zu zehn Kinder können mitfahren	<i>Up to ten children can come with us</i>
Sie ist zwischen 30 und 40 Jahre alt	<i>She is between 30 and 40 years old</i>

However, when they are used as prepositions, the following noun phrase is in the accusative or dative case, as normally required by the particular preposition:

Kinder unter sieben Jahren zahlen die Hälfte	<i>Children under seven years old pay half-price</i>
Kinder über sechs Jahre zahlen voll geeignet für Kinder zwischen sieben und zwölf Jahren	<i>Children over six years old pay the full price suitable for children between the ages of seven and twelve</i>

It is quite straightforward to work out whether these words are being used as **adverbs** (when they do not influence the selection of case) or **prepositions** (when they do), since in contexts where they are being used as adverbs the sentence would still be correct if they were left out: *Zehn Kinder können mitfahren.*

But if they are being used as prepositions, they cannot be omitted: **Kinder sieben Jahren zahlen die Hälfte* is not a grammatical sentence.

A few other adverbials can be used with numbers, e.g.:

Es dauert gut drei Stunden *It lasts a good three hours*

Er gab mir **ganze** fünf Euro *He gave me all of five euros*

8.2 Ordinal numbers

ORDINAL NUMBERS are those used as adjectives like English ‘(the) first, second, third’, etc. The forms of ordinal numbers in German are given in [Table 8.2](#), with the definite article. Most are formed by adding the **suffix -te** to the cardinals 2–19 and **-ste** to the cardinals from 20 upwards, but *das erste* ‘first’, *das dritte* ‘third’ and *das siebte* ‘seventh’ are exceptions to this pattern. **All ordinal numbers are declined like adjectives.**

[Table 8.2](#) The forms of the ordinal numbers

1 das erste	
2 das zweite	
3 das dritte	
4 das vierte	
5 das fünfte	
6 das sechste	
7 das siebte	
8 das achte	
9 das neunte	
10 das zehnte	
11 das elfte	
12 das zwölfte	
13 das dreizehnte	
14 das vierzehnte	
15 das fünfzehnte	
16 das sechzehnte	
17 das siebzehnte	
18 das achtzehnte	
19 das neunzehnte	
	20 der zwanzigste
	21 der einundzwanzigste
	27 der siebenundzwanzigste
	30 der dreißigste
	40 der vierzigste
	50 der fünfzigste
	60 der sechzigste
	70 der siebzigste
	80 der achtzigste
	90 der neunzigste
	100 der hundertste
	101 der hundert(und)erste
	117 der hundertsiebzehnte
	1000 der tausendste
	1 000 000 der millionste
5437 das fünftausendvierhundertsiebenunddreißigste	

(a) Ordinal numbers are indicated in writing by using a full stop after the numeral

am 14. Mai das 275. Regiment die 12. Klasse

This is the only usual means of indicating ordinal numbers in writing, as abbreviations, e.g. *am 5 **ten** Mai*, are no longer used.

(b) Ordinal numbers can be used as nouns

They are then written with initial capitals like other adjectives used as nouns:

jeder **Dritte** Er kam als **Erster** Wer ist der **Zweite** ?

As with other adjectives, a small initial letter is used if the noun is understood, e.g. *Anke war die erste Frau in unserem Kreis, aber wer war die zweite?* (see 6.2.1).

(c) Equivalents for English ‘to be the first to’

For ‘to be the first to’, German uses either *als **Erster***, or *der **Erste*** followed by a relative clause:

Die Russen waren die Ersten , die einen künstlichen Erdsatelliten um den Globus schickten; sie brachten als Erste einen Menschen in den Weltraum (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>The Russians were the first to send an artificial satellite around the earth; they were the first to put a man into space</i>
Dann musste Konstantin als Erster über den Graben (<i>Dönhoff</i>)	<i>Then Konstantin had to be the first to cross the ditch</i>

(d) The form *der wievielte* is used to enquire about numbers

Das **wievielte** Kind ist das jetzt? *How many children is that now?*

Den **Wievielten** haben wir heute? *What's the date today?*

Zum **wievielten** Mal bist du schon hier? *How many times have you been here?*

(e) Equivalents for English 'first(ly)', 'secondly', etc.

For these adverbial numerals, German uses the stem of the ordinal with the suffix **-ens**, e.g.:

erstens first(ly), *zweitens* secondly, *drittens* thirdly, etc.

Alternatively, the forms *zum Ersten*, *zum Zweiten*, *zum Dritten*, etc. are used.

(f) Ordinal numbers can be compounded with superlatives

die **zweitbest** e Arbeit die **drittgrößt** e Stadt der **vierthöchst** e Berg

(g) *der x-te* and *der zigste* are used as indefinite ordinals

i.e. as equivalents of English 'the umpteenth', e.g.:

Das war mein x-ter / zigster Versuch

x-te is pronounced [ɪkst ə]. For the form *zig*, see 8.1.21.

8.3 Fractions and decimals

8.3.1 Usage with fractions (*die Bruchzahlen*) and decimals

(a) The form of fractions

Fractions in German are neuter nouns formed by adding - **el** to the ordinal

stem:

ein Drittel ein Viertel ein Fünftel ein Achtel ein Zehntel

They have no ending in the plural, e.g. *zwei Drittel*. The ending - *n* is optional in the dative plural:

Die Prüfung wurde von **vier Fünftel(n)** der Schüler bestanden

If a fraction in the dative is followed by a phrase in the genitive, it sometimes lacks the expected ending, although it is more usually included:

in einem Drittel der Fälle (*less common*: in ein Drittel der Fälle)

When used with full integers, fractions are read out as written, with no *und*:

358 *drei fünftel* 17/10 *eins siebenzehntel*

(b) Verb agreement with fractions

If a fraction is the subject of a verb, then it takes a singular or plural ending as appropriate, see 10.1.4:

Ein Drittel **ist** schon verkauft Zwei Drittel **sind** schon verkauft

However, in everyday speech the verb is often in the singular, e.g. *Zwei Drittel der Mannschaft wird vermisst*, although correct usage prefers the plural, especially in writing: *Zwei Drittel der Mannschaft werden vermisst*.

(c) The spelling of fractions

(i) When fractions are followed by a noun of measurement they are spelled with a small letter, and an accompanying indefinite article takes its case and gender from the noun:

mit einer **drittel** Flasche mit einem **viertel** Liter

(ii) Fractions can be written together with measurement words, e.g. *ein Viertelliter*, *fünf Achtelliter*, *vier Zehntelgramm* and (especially) *eine Viertelstunde*. The following alternatives are thus all acceptable:

Er verfehlte den Rekord um **drei Zehntel einer Sekunde**

Er verfehlte den Rekord um **drei zehntel Sekunden**

Er verfehlte den Rekord um **drei Zehntelsekunden**

(iii) ***drei Viertel*** can be used in the same way, as a noun phrase: *der Topf ist zu drei Vierteln voll*, or, with a small letter, as an adverb: *der Topf ist drei viertel voll*.

It can be compounded with *Stunde*, e.g. *in einer Dreiviertelstunde* ‘in three-quarters of an hour’, or, alternatively: *in drei Viertelstunden*.

(d) Decimals

In German, decimals are written with a comma, NOT with a point, e.g.:

0,7 nullkommasieben	4,75 vierkommasiebenfünf
1,25 einskommazweifünf	109,1 hundertneunkommaeins
3,426 dreikommavierzweisechs	

In everyday usage, two places of decimals are frequently read out in terms of tens and units, e.g. *4,75 vierkommafünfundsiebzig*.

8.3.2 ‘half’

English ‘half’ can correspond to the adjective *halb* or the noun *die Hälfte*, which are used as follows:

(a) ‘half’, used as a noun, is normally *die Hälfte*

Er hat mir nur **die Hälfte** gegeben *He only gave me half*

die größere **Hälfte** *the bigger half*

However, the form *das Halb*, from the adjective, is used to refer to the number as such:

(Ein) **Halb** ist mehr als ein Drittel *Half is more than a third*

(b) The usual equivalent of ‘half a’ is the indefinite article *ein* with the adjective *halb*

Ich aß einen **halben** Apfel *I ate half an apple*

ein **halbes** Dutzend *half a dozen*

ein **halbes** Brot *half a loaf*

(c) ‘half the/this/my’

The most usual equivalent is the noun *die Hälfte* with a following genitive, but the appropriate determiner can be used with *halb* if the reference is to a whole thing which can be divided cleanly in two:

Die Hälfte der/dieser Äpfel ist schlecht *Half the/these apples are bad*

die Hälfte meines Geldes *half my money*

Ich aß **die Hälfte des Kuchens**

Ich aß **den halben Kuchen**

}

I ate half the cake

In colloquial speech *halb* is sometimes used with a plural noun in this meaning, e.g. *die halben Äpfel* ‘half the apples’. However, this is not accepted as standard.

(d) English adverbial ‘half’ corresponds to German *halb*

halb angezogen *half dressed*

Er weiß alles nur **halb** *He only half knows things*

(e) German equivalents for English ‘one and a half’

For ‘one and a half’ German can use either **eineinhalb** or (in more informal usage) **anderthalb**.

‘two and a half’, ‘three and a half’, etc. are **zweieinhalb**, **dreieinhalb**, etc. They never have any endings:

Bis Walldürn sind es noch eineinhalb/anderthalb Stunden	<i>It's another hour and a half to Walldürn</i>
Sie wollte noch sechseinhalf Monate bleiben	<i>She wanted to stay another six and a half months</i>

(f) Other phrases and idioms with ‘half’:

Er hatte halb so viel wie ich	<i>He had half as much as me</i>
Kinder fahren zum halben Preis	<i>Children travel half price</i>
Er ist mir auf halbem Wege entgegentgekommen	<i>He met me halfway (literally and figuratively)</i>
Ich nehme noch ein Halbes	<i>I'll have another half</i>
Das ist nichts Halbes und nichts Ganzes	<i>That's neither flesh nor fowl</i>
Die Besucher waren zur Hälfte Deutsche	<i>Half the visitors were German</i>
nach der ersten Halbzeit	<i>after the first half (sport)</i>
halb Europa, halb München (see 6.1.3g)	<i>half Europe, half Munich</i>

8.4 Other numerical usages

8.4.1 Numerically equal distribution

i.e. ‘each’ of two or more receiving the same. This is expressed by **je**:

Ich gab den Jungen je zehn Euro	<i>I gave each of the boys/each boy ten euros</i>
A. und B. wurden zu je drei Jahren verurteilt	<i>A and B were each sentenced to three years</i>
Sie erhielten je fünf Kilo Reis	<i>They each received five kilograms of rice</i>

8.4.2 Multiples

(a) To form multiples, **-fach** is suffixed to the cardinal number

e.g. *einfach* ‘single’, *zweifach* ‘twofold’, *dreifach* ‘threefold’, etc.:

eine einfach e Karte	<i>a single ticket</i>
ein vierfach er Olympiasieger	<i>a four-time gold-medal winner</i>
Die Grundstückspreise stiegen zunächst aufs Zehnfach e (Böll)	<i>The price of land first went up tenfold</i>

- *fach* can also be suffixed to some indefinites, e.g. *vielfach* or *mehrfach* ‘manifold’, ‘frequent(ly)’, ‘repeatedly’, *mannigfach* ‘varied’, ‘manifold’.

The variant form *zwiefach* for *zweifach* is still occasionally used, but sounds rather old-fashioned.

(b) The suffix **-fältig**

e.g. *zweifältig*, *dreifältig*, *vielfältig*, etc. These can be used as multiples, but they are rather less common than forms in *-fach*.

A couple of forms lack *Umlaut*, i.e. *mannigfaltig* ‘diverse’ (which is more

frequent than *mannigfach* with the same meaning), and *die* (*heilige*) *Dreifaltigkeit* ‘the (Holy) Trinity’.

einfältig is most often used with the figurative meaning ‘simple(-minded)’.

(c) ‘double’

For English ‘double’, German can use *zweifach* and *doppelt*. They are sometimes interchangeable, but *zweifach* usually refers to **two different things** (corresponding to English ‘two-fold’), while *doppelt* refers to **two of the same**, e.g.:

der zweifache Etappensieger bei der Tour de France	<i>the two-fold stage-winner in the Tour de France</i>
Er ist verheiratet und zweifacher Vater erwachsener Töchter	He is married and the father of two grown-up daughters
Der Koffer hat einen doppelten Boden	<i>The suitcase has a double bottom</i>

(d) ‘single’

In the sense ‘individual’, ‘separate’, the equivalent of English *single* is *einzel*:

Die Bände werden **einzel**n verkauft *The volumes are sold singly/separately*

In the sense ‘sole’, the equivalent is *einzig*:

Er hat keinen **einzig**en Freund *He hasn’t got a single friend*

(e) The suffix *-erlei*

- *erlei* is added to the cardinal numbers to give forms which mean ‘x kinds of’, e.g. *zweierlei* ‘two kinds of’, *dreierlei* ‘three kinds of’, *vielerlei* ‘many kinds of’, etc. They can be used as nouns or adjectives and do not decline:

Ich ziehe zweierlei Bohnen	<i>I grow two kinds of beans</i>
Er hat hunderterlei Pläne	He's got hundreds of different plans
Ich habe ihm dreierlei vorgeschlagen	<i>I suggested three different things to him</i>

einerlei is most often used in the sense 'all the same' (i.e. = *egal, gleich*, etc.), e.g. *Das ist mir alles einerlei.*

8.4.3 Forms in *-mal(s)*

(a) Adverbs expressing a number of occasions are formed by adding *-mal* to the cardinals

<i>einmal</i> once	<i>zweimal</i> twice	<i>dreimal</i> three times	<i>zehnmal</i> ten times
<i>hundertmal</i> a hundred times	<i>x-mal, zigmal</i> umpteen times	<i>dutzendmal</i> a dozen times	
Ich habe ihn diese Woche dreimal gesehen	<i>I've seen him three times this week</i>		
Ich habe es hundertmal bereut	I've regretted it a hundred times		
Also, Herr Ober, zweimal Gulasch, bitte	Right, waiter, goulash for two, please		
anderthalbmal so groß wie der andere Luftballon	<i>half as big again as the other balloon</i>		

If particular emphasis is needed, the cardinal and the noun *Mal* 'times' can be written separately, e.g. *neun Mal!* 'nine times!'

(b) Adjectives are formed from these adverbs by suffixing *-ig*

(see 20.3.1d), e.g. *einmalig, zweimalig*:

eine einmalige Gelegenheit	<i>a unique opportunity</i>
-----------------------------------	-----------------------------

nach **dreimaligem** Durchlesen seines Briefes *after reading his letter three times*

mehrmalig ‘repeated’ is formed in a similar way.

(c) Forms and phrases with *-mal* and *Mal*

(i) **das Mal** (plural *die Male*) is a neuter noun, and it is normally written separately from any preceding adjectives or determiners, with an initial capital letter:

das erste Mal , als ich ihn sah	Das letzte Mal war das schönste
kein einziges Mal	ein um das andere Mal <i>time after time</i>
Ich werde es nächstes Mal tun	Das vorige Mal war es schöner
Zum wievielten Mal bist du hier ?	Beim vorletzten Mal war sie schwer
Jedes Mal bist du zu spät	krank
gekommen	Er war nur ein paar Mal dort gewesen
Beide Male bin ich durchgefallen	viele (hundert) Male
Ich habe ihn oft besucht; das eine Mal zeigte er mir seine Sammlung	
Dieses Mal wird sie mich anders behandeln müssen	
Die letzten paar Male war sie nicht zu Hause	

(ii) The form *-mal* can be compounded in a few instances:

diesmal <i>this time</i>	dutzendmal <i>a dozen times</i>	keinmal <i>on no occasion</i>	manchmal <i>sometimes</i>
ein paarmal <i>a few times</i> ein andermal <i>another time</i> x-mal <i>lots of times</i>			

Compounds like these have been restricted by the recent spelling reform and only those given above are now accepted. Some others which had been usual, like *jedesmal* and *zum erstenmal*, are no longer possible and have been replaced by the full phrases, with each word written separately, as shown in (i) above.

(iii) *mal* (with a small initial letter) is used to express multiplication, for

English ‘times’ (see 8.4.5), e.g.:

sieben **mal** vier ist achtundzwanzig *seven times four is twenty-eight*

(d) Forms in *-mals*

The suffix *-mals* is used to form a few adverbs to indicate ‘time(s)’, i.e. *erstmals* ‘for the first time’, *mehrmals* ‘repeatedly’ and *vielmals* ‘many times’.

Ich danke Ihnen vielmals	} <i>Many thanks</i>
Danke vielmals	
Ich bitte vielmals um Entschuldigung	<i>I do apologize</i>
Sie lässt Sie vielmals grüßen	<i>She sends you her kindest regards</i>
Nachdem der Horst jahrelang unbenutzt war, hatten erstmals im Jahr 2011 zwei Störche Quartier bezogen (BrZ)	<i>After the nest had not been used for years two storks moved in for the first time in 2011</i>
Der russische Präsident hatte bereits mehrmals in die Ukraine reisen wollen (SGT)	<i>The Russian President had already wanted to travel to Ukraine on many occasions</i>

8.4.4 Mathematical expressions

The common arithmetic and mathematical functions are expressed as follows in German. Some of the symbols used in the German-speaking countries are rather different from those current in English-speaking countries:

$4 + 5 = 9$	vier und/plus fünf ist/macht/gleich neun
$8 - 6 = 2$	acht weniger/minus sechs ist/gleich zwei
$3 \times 4 = 12$ $3 \cdot 4 = 12$ }	drei mal vier ist/gleich zwölf
$8 : 2 = 4$	acht (geteilt) durch zwei ist/gleich vier
$3^2 = 9$	drei hoch zwei (drei zum Quadrat) ist/gleich neun
$3^3 = 27$	drei hoch drei ist/gleich siebenundzwanzig
$\sqrt{9} = 3$	Quadratwurzel/zweite Wurzel aus neun ist/gleich drei
$5 > 3$	fünf ist größer als drei

8.5 Times and dates

8.5.1 Clock times

(a) In everyday speech the twelve-hour clock is the norm for giving the time

When reference is not being made to public events, official timetables and the like, the twelve-hour clock is used in everyday conversation in German, as in English. The forms are given in [Table 8.3](#).

[Table 8.3](#) Clock times

1.00	Es ist ein Uhr/Es ist eins	<i>It's one (o'clock)</i>
3.00	Es ist drei (Uhr)	<i>It's three (o'clock)</i>
3.05	fünf (Minuten) nach drei	<i>five (minutes) past three</i>
3.07	sieben Minuten nach drei	<i>seven minutes past three</i>
3.10	zehn (Minuten) nach drei	<i>ten (minutes) past three</i>
3.15	Viertel nach drei/viertel vier (S. and E. Germany)	<i>quarter past three</i>
3.20	zwanzig nach drei/zehn vor halb vier	<i>twenty past three</i>
3.25	fünf vor halb vier	<i>twenty-five past three</i>
3.30	halb vier	<i>half past three/half</i>
3.35	fünf nach halb vier	<i>three</i>
3.40	zwanzig vor vier/zehn nach halb vier	<i>twenty-five to four</i>
3.45	Viertel vor vier/dreiviertel vier (S. and E. Germany)	<i>twenty to four</i>
3.47	dreizehn Minuten vor vier	<i>quarter to four</i>
3.50	zehn (Minuten) vor vier	<i>thirteen minutes to four</i>
3.55	fünf (Minuten) vor vier	<i>ten (minutes) to four</i>
		<i>five (minutes) to four</i>

(b) In official contexts the twenty-four-hour clock is used

This is the norm in timetables, for television and radio programmes, theatrical performances, official meetings, business hours, and in all other official contexts. There is thus no equivalent in German for English *a.m.* and *p.m.* Examples are given in [Table 8.4](#).

[Table 8.4](#) The twenty-four-hour clock

0.27	null Uhr siebenundzwanzig	12.27 a.m.
5.15	fünf Uhr fünfzehn	5.15 a.m.
10.30	zehn Uhr dreißig	10.30 a.m.
13.07	dreizehn Uhr sieben	1.07 p.m.
21.37	einundzwanzig Uhr siebenunddreißig	9.37 p.m.
24.00	vierundzwanzig Uhr	12.00 midnight

When these forms are spoken, the word *Uhr* is only omitted in giving the full hours between 1 a.m. and noon, e.g. *Ihr Zug kommt um 9.00 an* (spoken: *um neun (Uhr)*).

Otherwise the full forms, with *Uhr*, are used, e.g. *Die Vorstellung beginnt um 20.00* (spoken: *um zwanzig Uhr*), *um 20.15* (*um zwanzig Uhr fünfzehn*), *Der Zug fährt um 9.17* (*um neun Uhr siebzehn*), etc.

Even in everyday conversation it is common for ‘official’ times to be given using the twenty-four-hour clock. Thus one would say *Mein Zug fährt um 19.35* (*um neunzehn Uhr fünfunddreißig*), but it would be odd to say *Tante Käthe hat uns für fünfzehn Uhr dreißig zum Kaffee eingeladen* – you would say *halb vier*.

(c) Further phrases with clock times

Wie viel Uhr ist es? Wie spät ist es? (<i>coll.</i>)	}	<i>What's the time?</i>
Wie viel Uhr haben Sie?		<i>What time do you make it?</i>
Um wie viel Uhr kommt sie?		What time is she coming?
Sie kommt um halb drei		She's coming at half past two
um drei Uhr nachts		at three in the morning
um neun Uhr vormittags		at nine in the morning
um zwölf Uhr mittags		at twelve noon
um drei Uhr nachmittags		at three in the afternoon
um sieben Uhr abends		at seven in the evening
um Mitternacht		at midnight
Es ist Punkt/genau neun (Uhr)		It is exactly nine (o'clock)

Es ist gerade halb
 Es ist ungefähr neun (Uhr)
 Es ist (schon) neun Uhr vorbei
 Er kommt ungefähr um neun Uhr
 Er kam gegen neun (Uhr) an

It is just half past
 It's about nine (o'clock)
 It's gone nine o'clock
 He's coming at about nine o'clock
He came at about nine/just before nine

As the last example shows, **gegen** can be ambiguous with clock times, see 18.1.4g.

8.5.2 Days and months

(a) The days of the week

[Table 8.5](#) Days of the week

Sonntag	<i>Sunday</i>	Donnerstag	<i>Thursday</i>
Montag	<i>Monday</i>	Freitag	<i>Friday</i>
Dienstag	<i>Tuesday</i>	Samstag	} <i>Saturday</i>
Mittwoch	<i>Wednesday</i>	Sonnabend	

As the equivalent for 'Saturday', *Samstag* was originally restricted to South Germany and *Sonnabend* was preferred in the North (i.e. north of Frankfurt am Main). However, *Samstag* has recently come to be used much more widely at the expense of *Sonnabend*, which is now used only in the far north and in East Germany.

For English 'on Sunday', etc. German uses *am Sonntag*, etc., see 4.5c and 18.3.2b.

(b) The months

[Table 8.6](#) The months

Januar	<i>January</i>	Mai	<i>May</i>	September	<i>September</i>
Februar	<i>February</i>	Juni	<i>June</i>	Oktober	<i>October</i>
März	<i>March</i>	Juli	<i>July</i>	November	<i>November</i>
April	<i>April</i>	August	<i>August</i>	Dezember	<i>December</i>

- (i) In Austria, *Jänner* is always used for *Januar*, and, less commonly, *Feber* for *Februar*.
- (ii) *Juni* and *Juli* are sometimes pronounced *Jun o* and *Jul ei* to avoid confusion, especially on the telephone.
- (iii) For English 'in January', etc., German has *im Januar*, etc., see 4.5a and 18.3.7b.

(c) The major public holidays and religious festivals

Neujahr(stag)	<i>New Year's Day</i>
Heilige Drei Könige	Epiphany
Rosenmontag	<i>Carnival Monday</i> (the day before Shrove Tuesday)
Aschermittwoch	<i>Ash Wednesday</i>
Gründonnerstag	Maundy Thursday
Karfreitag	Good Friday
Ostersonntag	Easter Sunday
Ostern	Easter
Ostermontag	Easter Monday
Maifeiertag	<i>May Day/Labour Day</i> (1st May)
Fronleichnam	<i>Corpus Christi</i>
Pfingsten	Whitsun
Pfingstsonntag	Whit Sunday
Pfingstmontag	<i>Whit Monday</i>
(Christi) Himmelfahrt	<i>Ascension Day</i>
Mariä Himmelfahrt	<i>Assumption of the Virgin Mary</i> (15th August)
Tag der Deutschen Einheit	<i>Day of German Unity</i> (3rd October)
Allerheiligen	<i>All Saints' Day</i> (1st November)
Buß-und Betttag	<i>Day of Penitence and Prayer</i> (Wednesday preceding the last Sunday before Advent)
Mariä Empfängnis	<i>Immaculate Conception</i> (8th December)
der Heilige Abend or	<i>Christmas Eve</i>
Heiligabend	Christmas
Weihnachten	Christmas Day
Erster Weihnachts(feier)tag	Boxing Day
Zweiter Weihnachts(feier)tag	

Stephanitag/Stephanstag
Silvester

New Year's Eve

- (i) *Ostern*, *Pfingsten* and *Weihnachten* are usually treated as neuter singulars, see 1.2.7b.
- (ii) Not all of these are official public holidays throughout the German-speaking countries. There is much variation between individual *Länder* in Germany and Austria, and the Swiss cantons, and there are many additional local holidays.

8.5.3 Dates

(a) Ordinal numbers are used for the days of the month

e.g. *der fünfte April* 'the fifth of April'. In writing, they are only ever given with figures, never with words:

Der Wievielte ist heute? Den Wievielten haben wir heute?	}	<i>What's the date today?</i>
Heute ist der 8. (<i>spoken</i> : achte) Mai Wir haben heute den 8. (achten) Mai	}	<i>Today is the eighth of May</i>
Er kam am 5. (fünften) Juni, 2014/ am 5.6.2014 (am fünften, sechsten, zweitausendvierzehn)		<i>He came on the fifth of June 2014/ on 5.6.2014</i>

As the last example shows, the day is given **before** the month in German. This corresponds to usage in British English, but it is the reverse of American practice.

(b) Usage with dates including the day of the week

i.e. equivalents of 'Monday, the fifth of June'. There are three alternative equally current ways of expressing this in German:

(i) with the day of the week and the date in the accusative case:

Wir fliegen **Montag, den 5. Juni** (,) nach Australien

(ii) with the day of the week preceded by *am*, followed by the date in the accusative case:

Wir fliegen **am Montag, den 5. Juni** (,) nach Australien

(iii) with the day of the week preceded by *am*, followed by the date in the dative case:

Wir fliegen **am Montag, dem 5. Juni** (,) nach Australien

(c) Letter headings

In private correspondence (i.e. where the address is not printed on the notepaper), the writer's address is not usually written out in full at the head of the letter, as is the common British or American practice. Instead, just the town is given, followed by the date, which may be written in various ways, i.e.:

Siegen, **(den)** 5.6.15 Siegen, **am** 5.6.15

Siegen, **(den/d.)** 5. Juni 2015 Siegen, **im** Juni 2015

When writing a formal letter to an unknown person, especially for the first time, some Germans put their full name and address in the top left-hand corner of the letter and the town and date, as given above, in the top right-hand corner.

8.6 Addresses

The format recommended by the German and Austrian postal services is as in the examples below:

Herrn

Frau
Maria Jellinek

Dr. Ulrich Sievers
Sichelstraße 17
54290 Trier
Familie
Karl (und Ute) Schulz
Königsberger Straße 36
64711 Erbach/Odw.
Firma
Eugen Spengel
Rossgasse 7–9
07973 Greiz
(Herrn und Frau)
Peter und Eva Specht
Steinweg 2½
35037 Marburg/Lahn
An das
Katasteramt Westfalen
Bismarckallee 87
48151 Münster

Maximiliansgasse 34
1084 Wien
Herrn
Beat Wernli
Gerechtigkeitsgasse 24
3011 Bern
Monsieur Alain Dubois
rue Napoléon 17
94320 THIAIS
FRANKREICH
Mr & Mrs Frank Johnson
27 Corsland Ave
GUILDFORD
GROßBRITANNIEN
GU3 4AY
Mr. Albert McEvoy
30987 – 31st Street SW.
CALGARY
CANADA
T3C 1E5

Contrary to previous practice, no blank line is left above the name of the postal town or city. The postcode is regarded as essential. For post to other countries, the name of the town and the name of the country should be written in capitals below the street name. Prefixed country codes, e.g. **A** -1084 Wien, **CH** -3011 Bern, **D** -48151 Münster, **F** -94320 Thiais should no longer be used (although, in practice, many people still do).

Even in private correspondence it is now recommended that the sender's name and address should be given, in the same format, in the top left-hand corner of the front of the envelope, not on the back, as was traditional practice.

Modal particles

MODAL PARTICLES are words which express the speaker's attitude to what is being said.

They are words like **aber**, **doch**, **ja**, **mal**, **schon**, and the others shown in [Table 9.1](#) which alter the tone of what is being said and make sure that the speaker's intentions and attitudes are clearly understood. They typically

- appeal for agreement
- express surprise or annoyance
- tone down a blunt question or statement
- sound reassuring

[Table 9.1](#) German modal particles

aber	9.1.1	eigentlich	9.1.10	ja	9.1.19	schließlich	9.1.28
allerdings	9.1.2	einfach	9.1.11	jedenfalls	9.1.20	schon	9.1.29
also	9.1.3	erst	9.1.12	lediglich	9.1.21	sowieso	9.1.30
auch	9.1.4	etwa	9.1.13	mal	9.1.22	überhaupt	9.1.31
bloß	9.1.5	freilich	9.1.14	noch	9.1.23	übrigens	9.1.32
denn	9.1.6	gar	9.1.15	nun	9.1.24	vielleicht	9.1.33
doch	9.1.7	gleich	9.1.16	nur	9.1.25	wohl	9.1.34
eben	9.1.8	halt	9.1.17	ohnehin	9.1.26	zwar	9.1.35
eh	9.1.9	immerhin	9.1.18	ruhig	9.1.27		

There is no complete agreement as to which words in German should be classified as 'modal particles' (called *Abtönungspartikeln* or *Modalpartikeln* in

German). Their function is similar to that of adverbs of attitude (see 7.4.2), and like them **they can never be negated**. In general, though, they are less independent and **they cannot usually occur in first position in a main clause**, before the main verb.

English has very few words like this and tends to express an attitude to what is being said in other ways, especially by means of intonation and tag questions like ‘isn’t it?’ Because of this, learning to use modal particles idiomatically needs attention and practice, since they are a very characteristic feature of spoken German.

The sections in this chapter try to give some idea of the flavour of all the German modal particles, by giving hints and indications of approximate equivalents in the translations of examples. However, these can only be a rough guide to usage and the equivalents should be understood in this sense, not as practical translation equivalents. Special attention needs to be paid to those particles identified as ‘downtoners’ because there is a very clear tendency for German to use downtoners much more extensively than English.

Typical modal particles relate to the clause or sentence as a whole, but there is another group of particles, the so-called **scalar** or **focus particles** (called *Gradpartikeln* or *Fokuspartikeln* in German), like **sogar**, which focus attention on a particular word or phrase (usually immediately before or after the particle). These can correspond to words like *even*, but English also uses a so-called ‘cleft sentence’ (see 19.2.3a) to focus attention on a particular word or phrase, e.g. *Dieses Mal war der Mann aber schuld* ‘This time **it was the man who** was to blame’. The examples in the sections below show typical instances of this.

A major difficulty in identifying types of particle and explaining how they are used is that distinctions between them are not always clear-cut, and many of the words dealt with in this chapter can be used in more than one way. **auch** and **nur**, for example, are used both as modal and as focus particles; very many, like **eigentlich** and **vielleicht**, are used as adverbs of attitude as well as modal particles, and some, like **aber**, are also used as conjunctions. As differentiating between these categories is not always straightforward, it is most practical to deal

here with all uses of all the words which could be considered ‘modal particles’. They are listed in [Table 9.1](#), with an indication of the section where they are treated.

[9.1 German modal particles](#)

9.1.1 *aber*

(a) In STATEMENTS, *aber* expresses a surprised reaction

In effect, *aber* makes these statements into exclamations:

Das war aber eine Reise!	<i>That was quite a journey, wasn't it?</i>
Der Film war aber gut!	The film was good
Der Kaffee ist aber heiß!	<i>Oh! The coffee is hot</i>

aber can be given even greater emphasis by adding *auch*. Compare:

Das war aber auch eine Reise! *That really was some journey!*

ja is also used to express surprise (see 9.1.19b), but surprise resulting from a difference in kind, where *aber* indicates a difference in degree. Compare:

Der Kaffee ist **aber** heiß (i.e. hotter than you had expected)

Der Kaffee ist **ja** heiß (you had expected cold coffee?)

In this sense, *aber* is very similar in force to *vielleicht* (see 9.1.33a): *Der Tee ist vielleicht heiß!*

(b) Within a CLAUSE *aber* expresses a contradiction

In contexts like this, *aber* has much the same meaning as it would have at the

beginning of the clause (i.e. = English ‘but’, see 17.1.1). This sense is quite close to that of *doch* (see 9.1.7a), or *though* in English:

Mein Freund kam aber nicht Sie muss uns aber gesehen haben Jetzt kannst du etwas schneller fahren ... Pass aber bei den Ampeln auf! Dieses Mal war aber der Mann schuld	<i>My friend didn't come, though But she must have seen us You can go a bit quicker now ... Watch out at the lights, though! This time it was the man who was to blame, though</i>
--	--

As the last example shows, *aber* can focus attention on a following noun, and this often has the same effect as using a cleft sentence in English.

Used with *oder*, *aber* has the sense of ‘on the other hand’:

Wir jungen Leute konnten uns sportlich betätigen oder aber auch nur gemütlich zusammensitzen (SGT)	<i>We young people could play sport or on the other hand just sit round and relax</i>
--	---

(c) Used initially in EXCLAMATIONS, *aber* stresses the speaker's opinion

aber can sound scolding or reassuring, depending on the context:

Hast du was dagegen? Aber nein! Aber Kinder! Was habt ihr schon wieder angestellt? Aber, aber! Was soll diese Aufregung?	<i>Have you any objection? Of course not! Now, now, children! What have you been up to? Oh now! What's all the excitement about?</i>
---	--

(d) *aber* is also used as a coordinating conjunction

i.e. corresponding to English ‘but’, see 17.1.1.

9.1.2 *allerdings*

allerdings most often **expresses a reservation** about what has just been said. It usually corresponds to English ‘admittedly’, ‘of course’, ‘to be sure’, ‘all the same’, etc. *freilich* has a very similar meaning, see 9.1.14.

(a) Within a CLAUSE, the sense of *allerdings* is close to that of *aber*

(see 9.1.1b) It also expresses a **contradiction**, but it is a little less blunt:

Es ist ein gutes Buch, <i>allerdings</i> gefallen mir seine anderen etwas besser	<i>It's a good book. Even so, I like his others rather better</i>
Wir haben uns im Urlaub gut erholt, das Wetter war <i>allerdings</i> nicht sehr gut	The holiday was a good rest for us. All the same, the weather wasn't very good
Ich komme gern, <i>allerdings</i> muss ich zuerst der Rita Bescheid sagen	<i>I want to come, of course I'll have to tell Rita first</i>

(b) In ANSWER TO A QUESTION, *allerdings* expresses a strongly affirmative answer

There is typically the hint of a reservation of some kind which the speaker isn't saying out loud:

Kennst du die Angelika? Allerdings!	<i>Do you know Angelika? Oh yes! (I know what she's like, too!)</i>
Ist der Helmut schon da? Allerdings!	<i>Is Helmut here yet? Oh, yes! (and you should see who he's come with!)</i>

9.1.3 *also*

(a) WITHIN A CLAUSE *also* requests confirmation of what the other

person has just said

In this way, *also* typically corresponds to English 'so', 'thus' or 'then':

Du wirst mir also helfen können	<i>You're going to be able to help me, then</i>
Wann kommst du also genau?	<i>So, when are you coming precisely?</i>
Sie meinen also, dass wir uns heute entscheiden müssen	<i>So you think we're going to have to make a decision today</i>

(b) IN ISOLATION, *also* links up with what has just been said

also can introduce a statement, a question or an exclamation:

Also, jetzt müssen wir uns überlegen, wie wir dahinkommen	<i>Well then, now we've got to think about how we're going to get there</i>
Also, besuchst du uns morgen?	<i>So, are you going to come to see us tomorrow?</i>
Also, gut!	<i>Well all right then!</i>
Also, so was!	<i>Well I never!</i>

9.1.4 *auch*

(a) In STATEMENTS, *auch* stresses the reasons why something is or is not the case

auch can correct a false impression and is often used with *ja*:

Gerhard sieht heute schlecht aus – Er ist (ja) auch lange krank gewesen	<i>Gerhard's not looking well today – Well, he's been ill for a long time</i>
Jetzt möchte ich schlafen gehen – Es ist (ja) auch spät	<i>I'd like to go to bed now – Well, after all, it is late</i>
Das hättest du nicht tun sollen – Ich habe es (ja) auch nicht getan	<i>You ought not to have done that – But I didn't do it, you know</i>

(b) In YES/NO QUESTIONS, *auch* asks for confirmation

The speaker thinks something should be taken for granted and is making sure this is clear. English often uses a tag question in these situations:

Kann ich mich auch darauf verlassen?	<i>I can rely on that, can't I?</i>
Hast du auch die Rechnung bezahlt?	You did pay the bill, didn't you?
Bist du auch glücklich mit ihm?	<i>You're happy with him, aren't you?</i>

(c) *auch* turns W-QUESTIONS into rhetorical questions

auch is used to confirm that nothing else could be expected:

Was kann man auch dazu sagen?	<i>Well, what can you say to that?</i>
Ich bin heute sehr müde – Warum gehst du auch immer so spät ins Bett?	<i>I'm very tired today – Well, why do you always go to bed so late?</i>

Questions like these can be turned into exclamations which emphasize the speaker's negative attitude:

Was war das auch für ein Erfolg?!	<i>Well, what sort of success do you call that?!</i>
Wie konnte er auch so schnell abreisen?!	<i>How could he have left as quickly as that?!</i>

(d) *auch* reinforces COMMANDS

This is similar to English 'Be/Make sure ... !':

Bring mir eine Zeitung und vergiss es auch nicht!	<i>Bring me a paper and be sure you don't forget!</i>
Sei auch schön brav!	<i>Be sure you behave!</i>

(e) Other uses of *auch*

(i) Before a noun *auch* has the force of English ‘even’. It is an alternative to *sogar* or *selbst* as a focus particle:

Auch der beste Arzt hätte ihr nicht helfen können	<i>Even the best doctor wouldn't have been able to help her</i>
Auch der Manfred kann sich ab und zu mal irren Und wenn auch!	Even Manfred can be wrong now and again <i>even so, no matter</i>

Note that the usual equivalent for English ‘not even’ is *nicht einmal*.

(ii) As an adverb, *auch* means ‘too’, ‘also’, ‘as well’:

Peter will auch mit Gisela ist auch nett In Potsdam sind wir auch gewesen	<i>Peter wants to come too Gisela's nice as well We also went to Potsdam</i>
---	--

(iii) The combination *auch nur* expresses a restriction. It corresponds to English ‘even’, ‘as/so little/much as’, etc.:

wenn ich auch nur zwei Freunde hätte ohne auch nur zu fragen Es war unmöglich, auch nur Brot zu kaufen	<i>if I only had just two friends without even so much as asking You couldn't buy so much as a loaf of bread</i>
---	--

(iv) *oder auch* has the sense ‘or else’, ‘or even’:

Du kannst Birnen kaufen oder auch Pfirsiche	<i>You can buy pears or else</i>
---	----------------------------------

peaches

(v) *auch nicht*, *auch kein* and *auch nichts* are often used for ‘nor’, ‘neither’, etc.:

Ich habe nichts davon gewusst – Ich auch nicht Sie kann nicht nähen, und stricken kann	<i>I didn't know anything about it – Nor me/Neither did I</i>
--	---

sie auch nicht	She can't sew, and neither can she knit
Das wird ihm auch nichts helfen	That won't help him either
Er liest keine Zeitungen und auch keine Bücher	<i>He doesn't read any newspapers or books</i>

See 17.1.3d for more details on the German equivalents of 'neither' and 'nor'.

(vi) *auch* is also used in all kinds of concessive constructions where its meaning is similar to that of English 'ever', e.g. *Wer es auch sein mag* 'Whoever that may be'. For more details see 17.6.2.

9.1.5 *bloß*

bloß usually has a restrictive sense (= English 'only', 'simply', 'merely'). It is a rather less formal alternative to *nur* – see 9.1.25, where the uses of *nur* and *bloß* are compared:

Störe mich bloß nicht bei der Arbeit	<i>You'd better not disturb me while I'm</i>
Wie spät ist es bloß?	<i>working</i>
Wenn er bloß bald käme!	I wonder just what the time is?
Sie hatte bloß 100 Euro bei sich	If only he would come soon!
Sollen wir Tante Mia einladen? – Bloß nicht!	She only had 100 euros on her
	<i>Shall we invite aunt Mia? – No way!</i>

9.1.6 *denn*

(a) As a modal particle, *denn* is only used in QUESTIONS

(i) *denn* most often tones down the question, referring back to what has just been said, or to the general context, and it makes the question sound less blunt and more obliging. In *w*-questions it is almost automatic in speech:

Hast du denn die Renate gesehen?

Geht der Junge denn heute nicht in
die Schule?

Ach, der Bus hält. Sind wir denn
schon da?

Warum muss er denn in die Stadt?

Wie bist denn du gekommen?

Wie geht es dir denn?

Tell me, have you seen Renate?

Isn't the boy going to school today, then?

Oh, the bus is stopping. Are we already
there, then?

Tell me, why has he got to go to town?

Tell me, how did you get here?

How are you then?

In rapid colloquial speech, *denn* is often reduced to 'n and suffixed to the verb, e.g. *Hast'n du die Renate gesehen? Wie bist'n du gekommen?*

(ii) If there is a negative element in the question, *denn* signals reproach. The negative element may not be explicit, and the question itself expects a justification rather than an answer:

Hast du denn keinen Führerschein? *Come on, haven't you got a driving licence?*

Bist du denn blind?

Come on now, are you blind?

Wo bist du denn so lange geblieben? *Where on earth have you been all this time?*

Was ist denn hier los?

What on earth's going on here?

(iii) *denn* can convert *w*-questions into rhetorical questions, expecting a negative answer:

Wer redet denn von
nachgeben?

Who's talking of giving in? (prompting the answer:
nobody!)

Was haben wir denn damit
erreicht?

And what have we achieved by that? (prompting the
answer: nothing!)

Adding *schon* makes it absolutely clear that the question is rhetorical:

Was hat er denn schon damit
gewonnen?

And what did he gain by that? (prompting the
answer: nothing!)

(iv) Yes/no questions with *denn* can be used as exclamations of surprise. They often begin with *so*:

Ist das Wetter denn nicht herrlich?

How lovely the weather is!

So hat sie denn die Stelle erhalten?

So she did get the job!

(v) The combination *denn noch* is used to recall a fact:

Wie heißt er denn noch? *What is his name again?*

The sense of *denn noch* is similar to that of *doch gleich* (see 9.1.7c).

Other uses of denn

(i) *denn* is used as a coordinating conjunction indicating a cause or reason (see 17.1.2). It corresponds to English ‘for’, ‘because’, e.g.:

Er kann uns nicht verstehen, denn er
spricht kein Deutsch

*He can't understand us, because he
doesn't speak any German*

(ii) The combination *es sei denn, (dass)* is a conjunction meaning ‘unless’. It is mainly used in formal registers. For details see 14.3.3d.

Sie kommt gegen ein Uhr, es sei denn, sie
wird aufgehalten

*She's arriving at about one o'clock,
unless she's held up*

(iii) *geschweige denn* means ‘let alone’, ‘still less’. It is used mainly in formal registers:

Er wollte mir kein Geld leihen,
geschweige denn schenken

*He didn't even want to lend me any
money, let alone give me any*

(iv) *denn* is sometimes used in literary registers and set phrases after comparatives for *als* ‘than’, e.g. *mehr denn je* ‘more than ever’. For details, see 6.5.2a.

(v) *denn* is sometimes used in place of *dann* ‘then’ in everyday speech in North Germany, e.g. *Na, denn geht es eben nicht*. This usage is common, but is not accepted as standard.

9.1.7 *doch*

doch is used typically to try to persuade the listener of the speaker's point of view. It usually expresses a contradiction or disagreement and often corresponds to English 'though' or a tag question. The element of persuasion is given more force if *doch* is stressed.

(a) In STATEMENTS, ***doch*** indicates disagreement with what has been said

(i) If *doch* is stressed, it clearly contradicts, and its meaning is close to that of *dennoch* or *trotzdem*. If it is unstressed, it appeals more politely and tentatively for agreement or confirmation:

Gestern hat es doch geschneit	<i>All the same, it did snow yesterday</i>
Gestern hat es doch geschneit	It snowed yesterday, didn't it?
Ich habe doch Recht gehabt	All the same, I was right
Ich habe doch Recht gehabt	I was right, wasn't I?
Wir müssen doch morgen nach Bremen	All the same, we have got to go to Bremen tomorrow
Ich habe ihm abgeraten, aber er hat es doch getan	I advised him against it, but he did it all the same
Du hast doch gesagt, dass du kommst	<i>You did say you were coming, didn't you?</i>

(ii) When being used in this way, unstressed *doch* can turn a statement into a question expecting a positive answer. It is then the equivalent of a following *oder?* or *nicht (wahr) ?* and one of these may be used as well:

Den Wagen kann ich mir doch morgen abholen?	<i>I can collect the car tomorrow, can't I?</i>
Du kannst mir doch helfen(, oder)?	You can help me, can't you?
Du glaubst doch nicht, dass ich es getan habe?	Surely you don't think I did it?
Es hat ihr doch Sandra gesagt	<i>It was Sandra who told her, wasn't it?</i>

(iii) Unstressed *doch* can also mildly point out a reason for disagreement. In such contexts it has much the same force as *aber*, see 9.1.1:

Wir wollten doch heute Abend ins Theater gehen	<i>Surely we were going to go to the theatre tonight (, weren't we?)</i>
Die Ampel zeigt doch rot, wir dürfen noch nicht fahren	<i>But the lights are red, we can't go yet</i>

(iv) In literary German *doch* can be used with the verb first in the clause. This explains the preceding statement:

War ich doch so durch den Lehrbetrieb beansprucht, dass ich dafür keine Zeit fand (Grass)	<i>After all, I was so busy with my lessons that I didn't have any time for that</i>
---	--

(v) For the difference in meaning between *doch* and *ja* in statements appealing for the listener's agreement, see 9.1.19a.

(b) *doch* in COMMANDS

(i) The force of *doch* in commands varies depending on the context. Sometimes it adds a note of impatience or urgency, and in this sense it can be strengthened by *endlich* or, in a negative sentence, by *immer*:

Reg dich doch nicht so auf!	<i>For heaven's sake, don't get so excited</i>
Bring den Wagen doch (endlich) in die Werkstatt!	<i>For goodness' sake, take the car to the garage</i>
Mach doch nicht (immer) so ein Gesicht! Freu dich doch!	<i>Don't keep making faces like that Do cheer up</i>

(ii) In other sentences, *doch* can moderate the force of the command, making it sound more advisory or encouraging. This can be made even more clear by adding *mal* or *ruhig*:

Lassen Sie mich doch (mal) das Foto sehen!	<i>Why don't you just let me see the</i>
---	--

Kommen Sie doch (ruhig) morgen
vorbei!

photograph?
Why not drop by tomorrow?

(c) In W-QUESTIONS, *doch* asks for confirmation of an answer or the repetition of information

doch can be strengthened by adding *gleich* (see 9.1.16), and its force is then similar to that of *denn noch*, see 9.1.6a:

Wie heißt doch euer Hund?	<i>What did you say your dog is called?</i>
Wer war das doch (gleich)?	<i>Who was that again?</i>
Wohin fahrt ihr doch auf Urlaub?	<i>Where did you say you were going on holiday?</i>

(d) In EXCLAMATIONS, *doch* emphasizes the speaker's surprise

In such sentences the force of *doch* is close to that of *ja*, see 9.1.19b:

Wie winzig doch alles von hier oben aussieht!	<i>But how tiny everything looks from up here!</i>
Du bist doch kein kleines Kind mehr!	<i>You're not a baby any more, you know!</i>
Das ist doch die Höhe!	<i>That really is the limit!</i>
Wir haben doch Gulasch bestellt!	<i>But it was goulash we ordered!</i>

(e) In WISHES expressed with *Konjunktiv II*, *doch* emphasizes the urgency of the wish

See also 14.5.6b. In sentences like these *doch* is the equivalent of *nur* and can be used together with it, see 9.1.25c:

Wenn er doch jetzt käme!	<i>If only he would come now!</i>
Wäre ich doch (nur) zu Hause geblieben!	<i>If only I'd just stayed at home!</i>

(f) Other uses of *doch*

- (i) In reply to a question, *doch* contradicts a negative or emphasizes an affirmative reply

Bist du nicht zufrieden? Doch!
Kommt er bald? Doch!
Er hat nie etwas für uns getan. –
Doch, er hat mir einmal 100 Euro
geliehen

Aren't you satisfied? Yes, I am
Is he coming soon? Oh, yes
He's never done anything for us. – Oh, yes
he has, he once lent me a hundred euros

When used with *nein* or *nicht*, *doch* emphasizes a negative reply:

Mutti, kann ich ein Stück Schokolade
haben? – Nein doch, du hast jetzt genug
gegessen

Mummy, can I have a piece of
chocolate? – Certainly not, you've had
enough to eat

- (ii) As a conjunction, *doch* is an alternative to *aber* 'but', e.g. *Sie wollten baden gehen, doch es hat geschneit*. For details see 17.1.1.

9.1.8 *eben*

eben typically expresses a confirmation that something is the case and often corresponds to English 'just'.

(a) In STATEMENTS, *eben* emphasizes an inescapable conclusion

Das ist eben so
Ich kann ihn nicht überreden. Er ist eben
hartnäckig
Er zeichnet ganz gut – Nun, er ist eben
ein Künstler
Ich mache es, so gut ich eben kann
Eben das hat er schreiben wollen

But there, that's how it is
I can't convince him. He's just
obstinate
He draws quite well – Well, he is an
artist
I'll do it as well as I can (given the
circumstances)
That's what he wanted to write

(b) In COMMANDS, *eben* emphasizes that there is no real alternative

These commands are often introduced by *dann*:

(Dann) bleib eben im Zug sitzen!	<i>Well, just stay on the train, then</i>
(Dann) fahr eben durch die Stadtmitte!	<i>Well, just drive through the town centre, then</i>

halt (see 9.1.17) has much the same meaning as *eben*. It was originally limited to South Germany and Austria, but its use has spread rapidly in recent years and it is at least as frequent as *eben* in a large part of Germany.

(c) Other uses of *eben*

(i) *eben* can be used in the sense of ‘exactly’, ‘precisely’, ‘just’. In this meaning it can be used to emphasize the following word, or as a response to a statement or a question. *genau* is a common alternative:

Das wäre mir eben recht	<i>That would be just what I'd like</i>
Eben ‘daran hatte ich nie gedacht	<i>That's the one thing I hadn't thought of</i>
Eben dieses Haus hatte mir zugesagt	<i>It was this house which attracted me</i>
Das wird sie doch kaum schaffen. –	<i>She won't manage it, will she? –</i>
Eben!	<i>Precisely!</i>

(ii) Used with *nicht* before an adjective, *eben* lessens the force of *nicht*. *gerade* is a common alternative:

Sie ist nicht eben fleißig	<i>She's not exactly hard-working</i>
Der Zug war nicht eben pünktlich	<i>The train wasn't what you'd call on time</i>

(iii) As an adverb, *eben* means ‘just (now)’. *gerade* is very similar in meaning:

Wir sind eben (erst) angekommen	Eben geht mir ein Licht auf
Mit zweitausend Euro im Monat kommen wir eben (noch) aus	

(iv) As an adjective, *eben* means ‘level’, e.g. *Die Straße ist hier nicht eben*

9.1.9 *eh*

eh has a very similar meaning to *ohnehin* (see 9.1.26) or *sowieso* (see 9.1.30). Like them, it is an equivalent of English ‘anyway’ or ‘in any case’. Until recently it was used predominantly in colloquial South German, especially in Austria and Bavaria, but it is now widespread throughout Germany:

Wenn ich arbeite, brauche ich eh immer mehr zum Essen (<i>Kroetz</i>)	<i>When I’m working I need more to eat anyway</i>
Für eine Markenpersönlichkeit wie Sie ist das neue Magazin der Süddeutschen eh ein Muss (<i>SZ</i>)	<i>It goes without saying that the new magazine of the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” is a must for a person of quality like you</i>

9.1.10 *eigentlich*

eigentlich emphasizes that something is actually the case, even if it appears otherwise. It is often used to change the topic of conversation.

(a) *eigentlich* in QUESTIONS

(i) *eigentlich* is typically lightly stressed and can tone a question down and makes it sound more casual. It is close to the sense of English ‘actually’ and is often used in conjunction with *denn*:

Sind Sie eigentlich dieses Jahr schon in Urlaub gewesen?	<i>Tell me, have you been on holiday yet this year?</i>
Wohnt Eva (denn) eigentlich schon lange in Hameln?	<i>Has Eva actually been living a long time in Hamelin?</i>

(ii) In *w-* questions, *eigentlich* implies that the question has not yet been

answered fully or satisfactorily. In these contexts it is rather more heavily stressed and close in meaning to *im Grunde genommen*, *tatsächlich* or *wirklich*, with the sense of ‘at bottom’, ‘in actual fact’, ‘in reality’:

Wie heißt er eigentlich?	<i>What’s his real name?</i>
Warum besuchst du mich eigentlich?	<i>Why, basically, did you come to visit me?</i>

(b) *eigentlich* in STATEMENTS

(i) *eigentlich* indicates that something actually is the case, despite appearances. It moderates a refusal, an objection or a contradiction by indicating how strong the reasons are:

Er scheint manchmal faul, aber er ist eigentlich sehr fleißig	<i>He appears lazy sometimes, but in actual fact he’s very hard-working</i>
Ich wollte eigentlich zu Fuß gehen	<i>In actual fact, I did want to walk</i>
Ich trinke eigentlich keinen Kaffee mehr	<i>Well, actually, I don’t drink coffee now</i>

(ii) Sometimes *eigentlich* can signal that the matter is still a little open:

Wir haben eigentlich schon zu	<i>Well, actually, we’re already closed</i> (hinting that an exception might not be wholly out of the question)
Das darf man hier eigentlich nicht	<i>Strictly speaking, that’s not allowed here</i> (but, possibly, ...)

(c) As an ADJECTIVE, *eigentlich* means ‘real’, ‘actual’, ‘fundamental’

Was ist die **eigentliche** Ursache? Er nannte nicht den **eigentlichen** Grund

9.1.11 *einfach*

(a) *einfach* as a PARTICLE

When it is used as a particle, *einfach* emphasizes that alternative possibilities are excluded. It usually corresponds to English 'simply' or, especially in commands, 'just'. In commands it is frequently used in conjunction with *doch* and/or *mal*, and in exclamations it is often combined with *ja*:

Ich bin einfach weggegangen
Ich werde ihm einfach sagen, dass es nicht
möglich ist
Warum gehst du nicht einfach ins Bett?
Leg dich (doch) einfach hin!
Geh doch einfach mal zum Zahnarzt!
Heute ist das Wetter (ja) einfach herrlich!

I simply walked away
I'll simply tell him it's not
possible
Why don't you simply go to bed?
Why don't you just go and lie
down?
Why not just simply go to the
dentist?
The weather is simply lovely
today!

(b) *einfach* as an ADVERB

There is a clear difference in meaning between contexts where *einfach* is being used as an adverb and those where it is used as a particle. As an adverb, *einfach* is **always stressed** and means 'in a simple manner'. Compare the two uses in the following sentences:

Sie macht es einfach	<i>She is doing it simply</i> (in an uncomplicated way)
Sie macht es einfach	<i>She's simply doing it</i> ('just', 'without further ado')
Du musst einfach anfangen	<i>You have to begin simply</i>
Du musst einfach anfangen	<i>You simply/just have to begin</i>

9.1.12 *erst*

(a) As a modal particle in STATEMENTS and EXCLAMATIONS, *erst*

has intensifying force

erst implies that something really is the absolute limit and perhaps more than expected or desirable. It is often strengthened by adding *recht*:

Dann ging es erst (recht) los	<i>Then things really got going</i>
Das konnte sie erst recht nicht	That she really couldn't manage
Das macht es erst recht schlimm	That really does make it bad
Sie hat schon Hunger, aber das Kind erst (recht)!	<i>She may be hungry, but it's the kid who's really hungry</i>

In exclamations which are effectively wishes, *nur* or *bloß* are alternatives to *erst* (and may be used with it):

Wäre er doch erst zu Hause!	<i>If only he were at home!</i>
Wenn er (bloß) erst wieder arbeiten könnte!	<i>If only he could start work again!</i>

(b) *erst* as a focus particle

In this use *erst* focuses on the next word or phrase and indicates that there are/were less or fewer than expected.

(i) Before a number or an expression of quantity it corresponds to 'only':

Ich habe erst zehn Seiten geschrieben	<i>I've only written ten pages</i>
Er ist erst sieben Jahre alt	He's only seven years old
Ich habe erst die Hälfte fertig	<i>I've only got half of it finished</i>

(ii) Before other nouns the sense is 'nothing less than':

Erst mit einem Lehrstuhl in Berlin wird er sich zufrieden geben	<i>He'll only be satisfied with a professorship in Berlin</i>
--	---

(iii) In time expressions, *erst* implies that it is later than expected or desirable. It usually corresponds to English 'only', 'not before', 'not until' or, in some contexts,

‘as late as’:

Er kommt erst (am) Montag	{ <i>He's only coming on Monday</i> <i>He's not coming till Monday</i>
Es ist erst acht Uhr	
Ich kam erst im Sommer nach Heidelberg	<i>It's only eight o'clock</i>
erst wenn/als (see 19.3.2b)	I didn't get to Heidelberg until the summer
wenn er erst zu Hause ist, ...	not until, only when
Wir waren eben aus der Kneipe abgezogen	<i>once he's home ...</i>
Ich kann den Wagen erst Anfang nächste Woche abholen	<i>We had only just left the pub</i>
Erst im September ist es mir aufgefallen	I shan't be able to collect the car till the beginning of next week
	<i>It was only in September that I noticed it</i>

(iv) The opposite of *erst* ‘only’ as a focus particle is *schon*, see 9.1.29e.

(c) *erst* ‘only’ needs to be carefully distinguished from *nur* (see 9.1.25d)

(i) With numbers or expressions of quantity, *erst* implies that more are to follow. In English this can be made clear by adding ‘as yet’ to the sentence. *nur*, on the other hand, sets a clear limit, i.e. that number and no more. Compare:

Ich habe erst drei Briefe bekommen	<i>I've only received three letters (as yet)</i> (more are expected)
Ich habe nur drei Briefe bekommen	<i>I've only received three letters</i> (i.e. three and no more)

(ii) In time expressions, *erst* has the sense ‘not before’, etc., but *nur* means ‘on that one occasion’. Compare:

Sie ist erst (am) Montag gekommen	<i>She only came on Monday</i> (i.e. not before Monday)
Sie ist nur (am) Montag gekommen	

gekommen

She only came on Monday (i.e. on no other day)

The distinction between *erst* and *nur* is not always consistently maintained in colloquial speech, but it is usual to do so in writing.

9.1.13 *etwa*

(a) In YES/NO QUESTIONS, *etwa* implies that something is undesirable

It suggests that the answer ought to be *nein*. A common English equivalent is a negative statement followed by a positive tag question or an exclamation beginning ‘Don’t tell me ...’:

Hast du die Zeitung etwa schon
weggeworfen?

Ist das etwa dein Wagen?

Habt ihr etwa geschlafen?

*You haven’t thrown the newspaper away
already, have you?*

That’s not your car, is it?

Don’t tell me you’ve been asleep!

Questions like this with *etwa* can be in the form of statements, in which case they also contain *doch nicht*:

Sie wollen doch nicht etwa nach Paderborn
umziehen?

*You don’t want to move to
Paderborn, do you?*

(b) In NEGATIVE SENTENCES, *etwa* intensifies the negation

Sie müssen nicht etwa denken, dass ich ihn
verteidigen will

Komm nicht etwa zu spät zum Flughafen!

*Now don’t go and think I want to
defend him*

*Make sure you don’t get to the
airport too late!*

(c) In CONDITIONAL SENTENCES *etwa* stresses the idea of a possibility

Wenn der Zug etwa verspätet sein sollte, dann verpassen wir den Anschluss nach Gera	<i>If the train were to be delayed we'll miss our connection to Gera</i>
Wenn das Wetter etwa umschlagen sollte, müssen wir die Wanderung verkürzen	<i>If the weather were to change, we'll have to shorten our walk</i>

(d) *etwa* as a focus or scalar particle before a noun or noun phrase

(i) Before a number or expression of size or quantity, *etwa* expresses approximation:

Ich komme etwa um zwei	<i>I'll come at about two</i>
Es kostet etwa dreißig Euro	It costs about thirty euros
Er ist etwa so groß wie dein Vater	He is about as tall as your father
Wir haben es uns etwa so vorgestellt	<i>We imagined it to be something like that</i>

(ii) Before a noun or list of nouns, *etwa* suggests a possibility. It is often close in meaning to English 'for instance' or 'for example':

Er begnügte sich mit etwa folgender Antwort	<i>He was satisfied, for example, with the following answer</i>
Bist du sicher, dass du Jürgen gesehen hast, und nicht etwa seinen Bruder Thomas?	Are you sure you saw Jürgen, and not perhaps his brother Thomas?
Er hat viele Hobbys, (wie) etwa Reisen, Musik und Sport	He has a lot of hobbies, for example travelling, music and sport
Willst du etwa (am) Sonntag kommen?	You're not thinking of coming on Sunday, are you?
Hast du etwa Martina in Verdacht?	<i>Is it Martina you suspect, perhaps?</i>

9.1.14 *freilich*

freilich typically has a concessive sense and its meaning is similar to that of

allerdings, see 9.1.2. It **never** means ‘freely’, which is *frei* in most contexts.

(a) Within a clause *freilich* means ‘admittedly’, ‘all the same’

Es scheint freilich nicht ganz so einfach zu sein	<i>Admittedly, it doesn't appear to be that simple</i>
Wir nehmen ihn mit, freilich muss er pünktlich am Treffpunkt sein	<i>We'll take him with us, even so he'll have to get to the meeting place on time</i>

(b) In answer to a question, *freilich* stresses that the answer is yes

freilich is often used in conjunction with *ja*. It lacks the hint that there is some kind of reservation or qualification to the answer which is sometimes present with *allerdings*:

Kennst du die Angelika? – (Ja,) freilich (kenne ich sie)!	<i>Do you know Angelika? – Of course (I know her)!</i>
Kannst du auch alles besorgen? – (Ja,) freilich!	<i>Can you see to it all? – Certainly I can!</i>

9.1.15 *gar*

gar is used in a number of ways with an intensifying sense.

(a) *gar* can intensify negatives, especially *nicht* and *kein*

In these contexts *gar* is an alternative to *überhaupt*, see 9.1.31c:

Sie hatte gar nicht gewusst, ob er abfahren wollte (Johnson)	<i>She hadn't even known whether he wanted to leave</i>
Ich habe doch heute gar keine Zeit	<i>I really haven't got any time at all</i>

today

(b) *gar* can intensify *so* or *zu* with an adjective

allzu is a more frequent alternative in this sense:

Du darfst das nicht *gar* so ernst
nehmen

*You really mustn't take that quite so
seriously*

Es waren *gar* zu viele Leute auf der
Straße

*There were far too many people in the
street*

(c) *gar* can emphasize the following word and indicate surprise

In contexts like this *gar* is the equivalent of English 'even' or 'possibly' and is a less frequent alternative to *sogar*, used mainly in literary registers:

Eher würde ich einem Habicht oder *gar*
Aasgeier eine Friedensbotschaft anvertrauen
als der Taube (*Grass*)

*I would rather entrust a message of
peace to a hawk or even a vulture
than to a dove*

9.1.16 *gleich*

As a modal particle *gleich* is used in **w- questions** to politely request the repetition of information. It is often used with *doch*, see 9.1.7c:

Wie war Ihr Name (doch) *gleich*?
Was hast du *gleich* gesagt?

*What was your name again?
What was it you said?*

gleich is also used as a time adverb in the sense of 'immediately', e.g. *Ich werde ihn **gleich** fragen*, or to mean 'at once' or 'at the same time', e.g. *Er hat **gleich** zwei Hemden gekauft*.

9.1.17 *halt*

halt has much the same meaning as *eben* (see 9.1.8) and represents an attempt by the speaker to put an end to any discussion because the situation does not allow any alternatives. It was originally used mainly in the South, but in recent years it has become much more frequent elsewhere.

(a) In STATEMENTS, *halt* stresses that something is the case

Das ist halt so	<i>But there, that's how it is</i>
Da kann man halt nichts machen	There's just nothing you can do
Chinesisch ist halt eine sehr schwere	about it
Sprache	Chinese is just simply a very difficult
Junge Mädchen in dem Alter haben halt	language
ihren eigenen Willen	<i>Young girls just have a mind of their</i>
	<i>own at that age</i>

(b) In COMMANDS, *halt* stresses that there is no alternative

Commands with *halt* often begin with *dann*:

Dann nimm halt die U-Bahn!	<i>Just take the underground/subway, then</i>
(Dann) fahr halt etwas langsamer!	<i>Just drive a bit more slowly, then</i>

9.1.18 *immerhin*

immerhin indicates that something might not have come up to expectations, but is acceptable at a pinch. It corresponds most often to English 'all the same' or 'even so' and can be used within a sentence or (very frequently) as a response:

Du hast immerhin tausend Euro	<i>All the same, you won a thousand euros</i>
gewonnen	Even so, we were able to buy a new blu-
Wir haben uns immerhin einen neuen	ray player

Blu-ray-Player anschaffen können
Das Wetter im Urlaub war miserabel,
aber wir hatten ein schönes Zimmer –
(Na,) immerhin!

*The weather was lousy on holiday, but we
did have a nice room. – Well, that was
something, at least!*

9.1.19 *ja*

(a) In STATEMENTS, *ja* appeals for agreement

(i) By using *ja* the speaker insists that what they are saying is correct. A common English equivalent is the ‘do’ form of the verb, or a cleft sentence:

Wir haben ja gestern davon gesprochen
Ihr habt ja früher zwei Autos gehabt
Hier im Gebirge ist es ja im Frühjahr am
schönsten
Ich komme ja schon
Der katastrophale Zustand des Landes ist
ja gerade das Erbe der Diktatur (*Spiegel*)

*We did talk about that yesterday (you
know)
Of course, you used to have two cars
It’s in spring when it’s nicest here in
the mountains
It’s all right, I’m on my way
It is the catastrophic state of the
country which is the legacy of
dictatorship*

(ii) *ja* has a distinct meaning from *doch* (see 9.1.7a) when used to appeal for agreement. Whereas *doch* implies that the listener might have a different opinion, *ja* always assumes that speaker and listener agree. Compare:

Du könntest dir **ja** Karls Rad leihen
Du könntest dir **doch** Karls Rad
leihen
Das ist es **ja** eben
Das ist es **doch** eben
Er kann unmöglich kommen, er ist
ja krank er ist **doch** krank

*You could borrow Karl’s bike, of course (we
both know you can)
Surely, you could borrow Karl’s bike (you
might have thought you couldn’t)
Why, of course, that’s the point
Don’t you see, that’s just the point
He can’t possibly come, he’s ill, as you know
he’s ill, don’t you know*

(b) In EXCLAMATIONS, *ja* expresses surprise

Heute ist es ja kalt!	<i>Oh, it is cold today!</i>
Er hat ja ein neues Auto!	Why, he's got a new car!
Das ist ja unerhört!	That really is the limit!
Da kommt ja der Arzt!	<i>Oh (good), here comes the doctor!</i>

By using *ja* (or *doch*, which has a very similar force in exclamations, see 9.1.7d), the speaker expresses surprise that something is the case at all. Thus:

die Milch ist ja/doch sauer! would be said if the milk had been expected to be fresh

On the other hand, when *aber* or *vielleicht* are used in exclamations, surprise is expressed at the extent of a quality, see 9.1.1a and 9.1.33a, thus:

die Milch ist aber/vielleicht sauer! expresses surprise at *how* sour the milk is

(c) *ja* intensifies a COMMAND

There is often an implied warning or threat, especially if *ja* is stressed:

Bleib ja hier!	<i>Be sure to stay here!</i>
Geht ja nicht auf die Straße!	<i>Just don't go out onto the street!</i>
Er soll ja nichts sagen	<i>He really must not say anything (or else)</i>

nur is an alternative to *ja* to intensify commands and sound a note of warning, see 9.1.25a.

(d) *ja* can be used as a focus particle

In a string of nouns, verbs or adjectives, *ja* (sometimes in combination with *sogar*) emphasizes the importance of the one (usually the last) before which it is placed. This often corresponds to English *indeed* or *even*:

Es war ein Erfolg, ja ein Triumph	<i>It was a success, indeed a triumph</i>
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Es war ein unerwarteter, ja ein
sensationeller Erfolg
Sie konnte die Aussage bestätigen, ja
(sogar) beeiden

It was an unexpected, indeed a
sensational success
*She was able to confirm the testimony,
even on oath*

(e) *ja* is the affirmative particle, corresponding to English ‘yes’

e.g. *Kommst du morgen?* – **Ja!** It can also be used as a tag, e.g. *Es geht um acht los, ja?*

9.1.20 *jedenfalls*

The phrases *auf jeden Fall* and *auf alle Fälle* are possible alternatives to the particle *jedenfalls* in most contexts.

(a) In STATEMENTS *jedenfalls* stresses the reason why something should be the case

(or why something is not as bad as it seems). In these contexts, *jedenfalls* corresponds to English ‘at least’ or ‘at any rate’, and *wenigstens* or *zumindest* are alternatives to it, see 7.7.2:

Vielleicht ist er krank, er sieht jedenfalls
schlecht aus
Er ist nicht gekommen, aber er hat sich
jedenfalls entschuldigt

*Perhaps he’s ill, at least he
doesn’t look well
He didn’t come, but at least he
did apologize*

(b) In COMMANDS *jedenfalls* indicates that something should be done in any event

jedenfalls corresponds to English ‘anyhow’ or ‘in any case’:

Bei schönem Wetter gehen wir morgen baden. Bring jedenfalls deinen Badeanzug mit	<i>If it's fine we'll go swimming tomorrow. Bring your costume along anyhow</i>
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9.1.21 *lediglich*

lediglich is used before another word to indicate a restriction or a limit. It is an emphatic alternative to *nur* in the sense of 'only', 'no more than'. It is typical of formal registers and can sound stilted:

Er hat lediglich zwei Semester in Münster studiert	<i>He only studied two semesters in Münster</i>
Ich verlange lediglich mein Recht	<i>I am only asking for what's due to me</i>

9.1.22 *mal*

(a) *mal* moderates the tone of a sentence, making it sound less blunt

(i) *mal* is very frequent in commands, requests and questions. It can correspond to English 'just' (although in practice this is used far less often than German *mal*):

Lies den Brief mal durch!	<i>Just read the letter through (will you?)</i>
Hol mal schnell den Feuerlöscher!	Just quickly go and get the fire extinguisher
Das sollst du mal probieren	You just ought to try that
Ich will ihr schnell mal simsen	I just want to text her quickly
Würden Sie mir bitte mal helfen?	Could you just help me?
Hältst du mir mal die Tasche?	<i>Just hold my bag for me, will you?</i>

(ii) In everyday spoken German *mal* is almost automatically added to commands, especially if there is nothing else in the sentence apart from the verb:

Sieh mal her! Hör mal zu! Komm mal herüber! Sag mal!

(iii) The tone of a request or a command can be moderated further by adding *eben*:

Reich mir eben mal das Brot!	<i>Just pass me the bread, would you?</i>
Lies den Brief eben mal durch!	<i>Won't you please just read the letter through?</i>

(iv) The combination *doch mal* makes a command sound more casual:

Nimm doch mal ein neues Blatt!	<i>Why don't you get another piece of paper?</i>
Melde dich doch mal beim Chef!	<i>Why not just arrange to see the boss?</i>

(v) *man* is a colloquial North German equivalent to *mal* in commands and requests

Geh du man vor!	<i>You just go ahead</i>
Seien Sie man bloß ruhig! (<i>Fallada</i>)	<i>Just keep calm</i>

(b) The particle *mal* is quite different to the adverb *einmal* 'once' (see 8.4.3a)

In other words, the particle *mal* is not simply a shortened form of *einmal*, which cannot be used for *mal* in any of the contexts explained in 9.1.22a. However, there are occasions when *einmal* is shortened to *mal* in everyday speech, but this should not be confused with the particle *mal*:

(i) *noch einmal* '(once) again', 'once more':

Ich habe ihn noch (ein)mal gewarnt	<i>I warned him once again</i>
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(ii) *nun einmal* 'just'. This combination emphasizes the lack of alternatives. It is a more forceful alternative to *eben* or *halt*, see 9.1.8a:

Es wird nun (ein)mal lange dauern	<i>It's just going to take a long time</i>
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(iii) *nicht einmal* ‘not even’:

Er hat sie nicht (ein)mal begrüßt *He didn't even say hello to her*

9.1.23 *noch*

(a) *noch* indicates something additional

(i) It can be used in this sense as a modal particle within the clause:

Das wird sich noch herausstellen	<i>That will remain to be seen, too</i>
Wer war noch da?	Who else was there?
Und es hat auch noch geregnet!	<i>And apart from that, it rained too</i>

(ii) It can also be used as a focus particle before a number, corresponding to English ‘another’:

Er hat noch drei Stunden geschlafen	<i>He slept another three hours</i>
Ich trinke noch eine Tasse Kaffee	<i>I'll have another cup of coffee</i>

(b) *noch* in time expressions

(i) *noch* can indicate that something is going on longer than expected. It corresponds to English ‘still’ or ‘yet’ and can be strengthened by *immer*:

Angela schläft (immer) noch	<i>Angela's still asleep</i>
Klaus ist (immer) noch nicht gekommen	Klaus hasn't come yet/Klaus still hasn't come
Sie wohnen (immer) noch in Fritzlar	They're still living in Fritzlar
Ich habe sie noch nie gesehen	I've never seen her (yet)
Sie ist doch noch jung	<i>She's still young, isn't she?</i>

(ii) If a particular point in time is indicated, *noch* indicates that an event took

place or will take place by then. The implication may be that this is contrary to expectations:

Ich habe ihn noch vor zwei Tagen gesehen	<i>I saw him only two days ago</i>
Sie hat noch im Mai ihre Dissertation abgegeben	She managed to hand her thesis in by the end of May
Ich rufe den Arzt noch heute an	<i>I'll ring the doctor before tomorrow</i>

In this sense, *noch* comes after short time words and phrases as well as before them, e.g. *Ich rufe den Arzt heute noch* an.

(c) Other uses of *noch*

(i) In *w*- questions, *noch* asks for the listener to jog the speaker's memory, i.e. suggesting that something has just slipped their mind:

Wie hieß er noch?	<i>Oh now, what was his name?</i>
Wann war das Spiel noch?	<i>Oh now, when was the game?</i>

(ii) *noch* is used with comparatives in the sense of 'even' (see 6.5.2c), e.g.:

Er ist **noch** größer als du

(iii) *noch* is used with *weder* as the equivalent of English 'neither ... nor' (see 17.1.3d), e.g.:

Er liest weder Bücher **noch** Zeitungen

(iv) *noch* is used with *so* and an adjective in a concessive sense (see 17.6.2b), e.g.:

Wenn sie (auch) **noch so** fleißig ist, sie wird die Prüfung doch nicht bestehen.

9.1.24 *nun*

(a) In QUESTIONS, *nun* signals dissatisfaction with a previous answer

By using *nun* the speaker insists that the correct or complete information should be provided:

Wann kommt der Zug nun an?	<i>When does this train get in, now?</i>
Stimmt es nun, dass sie verheiratet ist?	<i>Now, is it really true that she's married?</i>

nun is commonly used on its own as a question to push the other speaker to give more information, cf. *Nun?* 'Well?', *Nun ... und?* 'And then what?'

(b) *nun* signals that the speaker considers the topic exhausted

In this sense *nun* typically occurs on its own at the beginning of a sentence. It often corresponds to English 'well':

Nun, das ist alles schon wichtig, aber ich glaube, wir müssen zunächst das Wahlergebnis besprechen	<i>Well, of course that's all very important, but I think we've got to discuss the election results first</i>
Nun, natürlich hat er die besten Erfahrungen	<i>Well, of course he's got the widest experience</i>
Nun, wir werden ja sehen	<i>Well, we shall see</i>
Nun, meinetwegen!	<i>All right then</i>

(c) *nun* is used as an adverb of time to mean 'now'

nun is rather less specific than *jetzt* and it is not used as much to refer simply to the present moment:

Nun wollen wir umkehren	<i>Now we'll turn back</i>
Nun hat er mehr Zeit als früher	<i>Now he's got more time than he used to have</i>
Geht es dir nun besser?	<i>Are you better now?</i>

9.1.25 *nur*

nur is used as a modal particle with an intensifying sense, and as a focus particle with a restrictive sense (= ‘only’). *bloß*, see 9.1.5, is a frequent alternative to *nur* in all its uses except where indicated below. It is slightly more emphatic than *nur*, and it is used rather more in speech and less formal registers.

(a) In COMMANDS, *nur* intensifies the basic meaning

Depending on the sense of the command, i.e. whether it is an urgent instruction or a request, *nur* can make it sound more of a threat **or** more reassuring respectively.

(i) ‘**threatening**’ or ‘**warning**’ *nur* is more common in negative commands or when *nur* is stressed. This sense is similar to that of *ja* (see 9.1.19c):

Komm nur nicht zu spät!	<i>You’d better not be late!</i>
Nimm dich nur in Acht!	<i>You’d better be careful!</i>
Geh nur nicht in dieses Geschäft!	Whatever you do, don’t go into that shop
Sehen Sie nur, was Sie gemacht haben!	<i>Just look what you’ve done!</i>

In this sense, *nur* (but **not** *bloß*) can be used initially in a positive or negative command using the infinitive or with no verb at all:

Nur nicht so schnell laufen!	<i>Just don’t run so fast!</i>
Nur aufpassen!	<i>Just be sure to look out!</i>
Nur immer schön langsam!	<i>Take it nice and slow!</i>

(ii) The ‘**reassuring**’ sense of *nur* is close to that of *ruhig* (see 9.1.27):

Lass ihn nur reden!	<i>Just let him speak, do!</i>
Kommen Sie nur herein!	<i>Do come in!</i>
Hab nur keine Angst!	<i>Don’t be afraid, will you!</i>
Nur weiter!	<i>Just carry on! (implying: It’s all right so far)</i>

bloß is **not** used in this ‘reassuring’ sense, and commands with *bloß* always have a ‘warning’ tone. Compare *Lass ihn bloß reden!* ‘Just let him speak (and you’ll suffer the consequences)’ with the first example in (ii) above.

(b) *nur* intensifies W-QUESTIONS and makes them sound more urgent

Wie kann er nur so taktlos sein?	<i>How on earth can he be so tactless?</i>
Was können wir nur tun, um ihr zu helfen?	<i>Whatever can we do to help her?</i>
Wo bleibt sie nur?	<i>Where on earth is she?</i>

Questions like this can be used as exclamations of reproach or astonishment, as no real answer is possible or expected:

Wie siehst du nur wieder aus?!	<i>What on earth do you look like?!</i>
Warum musste er nur wegfahren?!	<i>Why on earth did he have to go away?!</i>

(c) *nur* intensifies a wish in the form of a *wenn*-clause

See also 14.5.6b. The force of *nur* is similar to that of *doch*, see 9.1.7e, and they are often used together to add an even greater intensity to the wish:

Wenn sie (doch) nur anrufen würde!	<i>If only she would call!</i>
Hätte ich nur mehr Zeit!	<i>If only I had more time!</i>
Wenn er mir nur geschrieben hätte!	<i>If only he had written to me!</i>

(d) *nur* is used as a focus particle to express a restriction

i.e. with the force of English ‘only’. *nur* is used in all kinds of sentences to qualify nouns, verbs or adjectives:

Ich wollte nur Guten Tag sagen	<i>I only/just wanted to say hello</i>
Die Mittelmeerküste ist sehr schön, sie ist	The Mediterranean coast is very nice,

leider nur etwas dreckig	only I'm afraid it's rather dirty
Er geht nur bei schönem Wetter spazieren	He only goes for a walk when it's fine
Ich vermute nur, dass er gestern in Urlaub gefahren ist	I'm only assuming that he went on holiday yesterday
Man kann es nur dort kaufen	It's only there you can buy it
Dort kann man nicht nur Bücher kaufen, sondern auch allerlei Zeitschriften	<i>You can not only buy books there, but also magazines of all kinds</i>

For the difference between *erst* and *nur* as an equivalent of English 'only', see 9.1.12c. *lediglich*, see 9.1.21, is a more formal alternative to *nur*.

nur dass is used as the equivalent of the English conjunction 'only' (see also 17.7f), e.g.:

Die Zimmer waren in Ordnung, **nur dass** die Duschen fehlten.

9.1.26 *ohnehin*

ohnehin indicates that something is correct irrespective of any other reasons given or implied. A typical English equivalent is 'anyway' or 'in any case'. It is a rather more formal alternative to the more colloquial *eh* (see 9.1.9), or to *sowieso* (see 9.1.30):

Er trinkt ohnehin zu viel	<i>He drinks too much anyway</i>
Der Zug hat ohnehin Verspätung	The train's late anyway
Du musst sofort zum Arzt – Ich hätte ihn ohnehin morgen besucht	<i>You'll have to go to the doctor right away – I would have gone to see him tomorrow in any case</i>

9.1.27 *ruhig*

ruhig lends a reassuring tone to what the speaker is saying. This meaning is clearly related to that of the adjective *ruhig* 'quiet'. It is used in commands (where it is an alternative to *nur*, see 9.1.25a), and in statements, especially with

a modal auxiliary:

Bleib ruhig sitzen! Arbeite ruhig weiter!	<i>Don't get up for me Just carry on (i.e. don't let me disturb you)</i>
Auf dieser Straße kannst du ruhig etwas schneller fahren	<i>It's all right, you can go a bit faster on this road</i>
Sie dürfen ruhig hier im Zimmer bleiben	<i>You can stay here in this room, I don't mind</i>

9.1.28 schließlich

schließlich indicates that the speaker accepts the validity of a reason. It usually corresponds to English 'after all', or a tag question:

Es liegt schließlich nicht genug Schnee auf der Piste	<i>After all, there isn't enough snow on the piste, is there?</i>
Wir wollen ihn schließlich nicht zu sehr reizen	<i>We don't want to annoy him too much, do we?</i>
Schließlich kann das einem jeden passieren	<i>After all, it can happen to anybody</i>

9.1.29 schon

(a) The use of *schon* in STATEMENTS

(i) *schon* generally expresses agreement or confirmation in principle, but with slight reservations. This sense is in practice concessive and *schon* often has (or implies) a following *aber*, *nur* or the like. *zwar* or, especially in North Germany, *wohl* are possible alternatives, see 9.1.34a and 9.1.35b:

Das ist schon möglich (aber ...) Ich wollte schon kommen	<i>That's quite possible (but ...) Well, I did want to come</i>
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Das stimmt schon, aber es könnte auch anders kommen	That may be true, but things might turn out differently
Ja, ich glaube schon (aber ...)	<i>Well, I think so (but ...)</i>
Der Film hatte schon wunderschöne Aufnahmen, nur war er etwas langweilig	<i>The movie may have had some lovely shots, only it was a bit boring</i>

(ii) In a **response**, *schon* corrects what has just been said and indicates why it was wrong:

Niemand fährt über Ostern weg – Mutter schon!	<i>Nobody's going away over Easter – But mother is</i>
Heute waren keine deiner Freunde da – Der Uli aber schon!	<i>None of your friends came today – But Uli did</i>
Er hat da ein sehr schönes Haus gekauft – (Das) schon, aber ...	<i>He's bought himself a very nice house there – Well yes, but ...</i>

(iii) In statements referring to the future, *schon* emphasizes the speaker's confidence that something will happen. *schon* usually sounds reassuring, but in some contexts and situations it may take on a more threatening tone. English 'all right' has similar force:

Er wird uns schon helfen	<i>He'll help us all right</i>
Es wird schon gehen	<i>It'll be all right, don't worry</i>
Ich krieg's schon hin	<i>I'll manage it all right</i>
Dem werde ich's schon zeigen!	<i>I'll show him all right!</i>

(b) *schon* gives persuasive force to a W-QUESTION

In particular if a negative answer is expected or the speaker has a negative attitude:

Was sagt die Regierung zu Russland?	<i>What does the government say about Russia?</i>
– Nichts. Was sollen sie schon sagen?	<i>– Nothing. But then, what are they to say?</i>
Wer kann diesem Angebot schon	<i>Who can refuse this offer? (i.e. 'nobody')</i>

widerstehen?
Warum kommt der schon wieder?
Na, und wenn schon?

*What's he coming back for? (implying:
'he's up to no good')
So what?*

(c) In CONDITIONAL SENTENCES *schon* emphasizes the condition

In addition, *schon* may point to the inescapability of the conclusion. It is normally used only in open conditions, with the indicative, see 14.3.2:

Wenn ich das schon mache, dann muss ich über alle Probleme informiert sein	<i>If I am going to do it, I'll need to be told about all the problems</i>
Wenn du schon ein neues Auto kaufst, dann aber kein so teures	<i>If you are going to buy a new car, then don't get such an expensive one</i>
Wenn sie schon ans Meer fährt, dann will sie auch baden	<i>If she's going to the seaside, she will want to go swimming</i>

(d) In COMMANDS, *schon* adds an insistent note

The sentence often begins with *nun*:

(Nun,) beeile dich schon!	<i>Do hurry up (then)!</i>
Fang schon an!	<i>Do make a start!</i>
Sag mir schon, was du denkst! Ich werde es dir nicht übel nehmen	<i>Do tell me what you think. I shan't take it amiss</i>

(e) *schon* is used as a focus particle to express a restriction

erst is the opposite of *schon* in the contexts dealt with under (i) and (ii) below, see 9.1.12b.

(i) Referring to time, *schon* indicates that something is happening or has happened sooner than expected or desirable. In some contexts, *schon* can stress that something actually has happened. In this meaning, it can correspond to

English ‘already’, but it is much more widely used:

Er war schon angekommen schon am nächsten Tag Da bist du ja schon wieder Sind Sie schon einmal in Köln gewesen? Ich habe ihn auch schon in der Bibliothek gesehen Das habe ich schon 2012 geahnt Schon im Mai ist es mir zum ersten Mal aufgefallen	<i>He had already arrived the very next day There you are back again Have you been to Cologne before? I’ve sometimes seen him in the library I suspected that as early as 2012 It was as early as May that I noticed it for the first time</i>
--	--

(ii) Before a number or an expression of quantity, *schon* indicates that this is more than expected or desirable:

Sie hat schon dreißig Mails bekommen Ich habe schon die Hälfte des Buches gelesen Er wartet schon eine Stunde auf dich	<i>She has already had thirty e-mails I’ve already read half the book He’s already been waiting for you for an hour</i>
---	---

(iii) When *schon* qualifies a noun (or, less often, another part of speech), it expresses a restriction:

Schon der Gedanke ist mir unsympathisch, schon wegen ihrer Kinder Das geht schon daher nicht, weil ... Schon vor dem Krieg war die Eisenbahn in Schwierigkeiten geraten	<i>I don’t like even thinking about it, not least because of their children That’s impossible, not least because ... Even before the war the railways had run into difficulties</i>
--	---

9.1.30 *sowieso*

sowieso indicates that something is correct irrespective of any other reasons given or implied. It usually corresponds to English ‘anyway’ or ‘in any case’. It is an alternative to *eh*, or, in rather more formal contexts, *ohnehin*, see 9.1.9 and 9.1.26:

Ich kann heute sowieso nicht arbeiten
Der ist sowieso scharf auf sie
Ich wäre sowieso nach Nürnberg
gefahren

*I can't work today anyway
He fancies her anyway
I would have gone to Nuremberg in any
case*

9.1.31 überhaupt

(a) **überhaupt** makes STATEMENTS and COMMANDS more general

The English equivalent is often 'at all' or 'anyhow':

Duisburg ist überhaupt eine grässliche
Stadt
Das ist überhaupt eine gefährliche
Angelegenheit
Er liebte die italienische Sprache, ja die
Sprachen überhaupt (*Goes*)
Seinen Mut müsste man haben, dachte ich.
Oder überhaupt Mut (*Walser*)
Ihr sollt überhaupt besser aufpassen!

*Duisburg is a dreadful city anyhow
That's a risky business in any case
He loved the Italian language,
indeed, languages in general
One ought to have his courage, I
thought. Or any courage at all
You ought anyway to pay more
attention*

(b) In QUESTIONS, **überhaupt** casts doubt on the basic assumption

Er singt nicht besonders gut – Kann er
denn überhaupt singen?
Wie konntest du überhaupt so was tun?
Der Brief ist nicht da. Wo kann er
überhaupt sein?
Was will er denn überhaupt?

*He doesn't sing particularly well –
Can he sing at all?
How could you do such a thing at
all?
The letter's not there. Wherever can
it be?
What on earth does he want?*

(c) **überhaupt** intensifies a negative

It typically corresponds to English 'at all'. *gar* is a common alternative, see 9.1.15a:

Du hättest es überhaupt nicht tun sollen, und besonders jetzt nicht Sie hat überhaupt keine Ahnung Ich weiß überhaupt nichts von seinen Plänen	<i>You ought not to have done it at all, and particularly not now She's got no idea at all I don't know anything about his plans</i>
--	--

9.1.32 *übrigens*

übrigens is used in STATEMENTS and QUESTIONS to indicate a casual remark which is incidental to the main topic of conversation. It corresponds to English 'by the way', etc.:

Ich habe übrigens erfahren, dass er eine neue Stelle bekommen hat Sie hat übrigens vollkommen Recht Wo wollt ihr übrigens dieses Jahr hin?	<i>Incidentally, I've found out he's got a new job She's perfectly right, by the way By the way, where are you going this year?</i>
---	---

9.1.33 *vielleicht*

(a) In EXCLAMATIONS unstressed ***vielleicht*** expresses surprise

These exclamations can have the form of statements or questions.

Siehst du vielleicht schlecht aus! Du siehst vielleicht schlecht aus!	{	<i>Oh, you really do look awful!</i>
Die Kiste ist vielleicht schwer!		<i>How heavy the crate is!</i>
Du bist vielleicht ein Idiot!		<i>You really are stupid!</i>
Das hat vielleicht gegossen!		<i>It really did pour!</i>
Ich habe vielleicht gestaunt!		<i>I wasn't half surprised!</i>

Like *aber* (see 9.1.1a), *vielleicht* expresses surprise at a difference in **degree** from the speaker's expectation, whereas *ja* (see 9.1.19b) relates to a difference in **kind**.

(b) In YES/NO QUESTIONS, *vielleicht* signals that the speaker expects a negative answer

The sense of *vielleicht* is close to that of *etwa*, see 9.1.13a. The English equivalent is often an exclamation beginning with 'Don't tell me...' or a negative statement followed by a positive tag question:

Willst du mir vielleicht erzählen, dass ...?	<i>You don't mean to tell me that ..., do you?</i>
Soll ich vielleicht bis 7 Uhr abends hier sitzen?	<i>I'm not supposed to sit here till seven at night, am I?</i>
Arbeitet er vielleicht?	<i>Don't tell me he's working?</i>

(c) *vielleicht* is used as an adverb of attitude corresponding to English 'perhaps'

Sie ist vielleicht 30 Jahre alt	<i>She is perhaps thirty years old</i>
Sie wird vielleicht morgen kommen	<i>She may come tomorrow</i>
Wird sie uns vielleicht morgen besuchen?	<i>Will she perhaps come to see us tomorrow?</i>

When it is used as an adverb *vielleicht* has a quite different meaning from when it is used as a particle. The difference is often only clear from the intonation, with heavy emphasis when it is being used as a particle:

Die Kiste ist vielleicht schwer	<i>Perhaps the case is heavy</i>
Die Kiste ist vielleicht schwer!	<i>How heavy this case is!</i>

In requests in the form of a question, *vielleicht*, like English 'perhaps', expresses polite reserve on the part of the speaker:

Könnten Sie mir vielleicht sagen, wo es
zum Bahnhof geht?
Würden Sie mir vielleicht helfen?

*Could you perhaps tell me the way to
the station?
Would you perhaps help me?*

9.1.34 *wohl*

(a) In STATEMENTS, *wohl* signals a fair degree of probability

The force of *wohl* is very similar to that of the future tense, see 12.3.2, and it is often used together with it. It corresponds to the English future tense or a positive statement followed by a negative tag question, or to formulae like ‘I suppose’, ‘probably’:

Das wird wohl der Briefträger sein
Sie sind wohl neu hier
Sie hat wohl ihr Auto schon verkauft
Diese Probleme versteht er wohl nicht
Ich habe ihn nie gesprochen, wohl aber
oft gesehen

*That'll be the postman
You're new here, aren't you?
I suppose she's already sold her car
He probably doesn't understand these
problems
I've never spoken to him, but I have
often seen him*

The combination *ja wohl* sounds rather more certain, corresponding to English ‘(pretty) certainly’ or ‘no doubt’:

Sie wird ja wohl noch in Potsdam sein
Das weißt du ja wohl

*She's pretty certainly still in Potsdam
No doubt you know that*

The combination *wohl doch* (or, for some speakers, *doch wohl*) sounds rather less certain, though the speaker hopes that it is the case:

Er hat wohl doch noch einen Schlüssel
Die Antje wird doch wohl noch das
Abitur schaffen

*Surely he's got another key, hasn't he?
Antje's surely going to get through her
Abitur, isn't she?*

(b) Stressed *wohl* in STATEMENTS has a concessive sense

wohl expresses agreement or confirmation in principle, but tinged with a slight reservation. It often has (or implies) a following *aber*, *nur* or the like. *zwar* (see 9.1.35a) or, especially in South Germany, *schon* (see 9.1.29a) are possible alternatives in this sense:

Er ist wohl mein Freund, aber ich kann ihm nicht helfen	<i>He may be my friend, but I can't help him</i>
Das ist wohl möglich(, aber ...)	<i>That may be possible(, but ...)</i>
Herbert ist wohl nach Basel gefahren, aber nur für eine Woche	<i>Herbert did go to Basle, but only for a week</i>

(c) In QUESTIONS *wohl* signals uncertainty on the part of the speaker

wohl can make the question sound tentative, as if the speaker doubts whether the other can give a clear answer. The question can be in statement form.

Wer hat diesen Brief wohl geschrieben? Wie spät ist es wohl?	<i>Who can possibly have written that letter?</i>
Ist Peter wohl schon zu Hause?	<i>I wonder what time it is</i>
Darf ich wohl bei Ihnen telefonieren?	<i>Peter is at home, isn't he?</i>
Ludwig ist wohl gestern Abend angekommen?	<i>Might I use your telephone? Ludwig arrived last night, didn't he?</i>

(d) *wohl* intensifies a COMMAND, making it sound urgent, insistent and rather abrupt

wohl is often used with *werden* or *wollen*:

Hebst du wohl das Buch wieder auf!	<i>Pick that book up again right away!</i>
Wirst du wohl sofort wieder ins Bett gehen!	<i>Will you go straight back to bed!</i>

Wollt ihr wohl endlich still sein!

Once and for all, will you be quiet!

(e) As an adverb, usually stressed, **wohl** has the sense ‘well’, ‘fully’

wohl often strengthens an affirmative response (i.e. *jawohl!* ‘yes, indeed’):

Ich fühle mich wohl	<i>I feel well</i>
Er hatte es sich wohl überlegt	He had considered it fully
Er weiß sehr wohl, dass er Unrecht hat	He knows full well that he’s wrong
Schlaf wohl!	Sleep well!
Leb wohl!	Farewell!
Und er war so geartet, dass er solche Erfahrungen wohl vermerkte (<i>Th. Mann</i>)	<i>And his nature was such that he took full note of such experiences</i>

9.1.35 *zwar*

(a) ***zwar*** can be used in a concessive sense

In this sense, *zwar* is typically followed by a clause with *aber* (or one is implied), and the combination *zwar ... aber* can have the force of English ‘(al)though’, see 17.6.2b:

Er ist zwar etwas erkältet, aber er kommt heute Abend noch mit	<i>Although he’s got a bit of a cold, he’s still coming with us tonight</i>
Er stand nach Kinkels Aussage „zwar in der Mitte, aber doch mehr nach rechts als nach links“ (<i>Böll</i>)	<i>According to Kinkel he was ‘politically in the centre, but tending all the same to the right rather than the left’</i>

wohl is a possible alternative to *zwar* in this concessive sense, especially in North Germany, see 9.1.34b, whilst in South and Central Germany *schon* is often used, see 9.1.29a.

(b) *und zwar* is used in the sense of English ‘namely’

It specifies something which has just been mentioned:

Mein Entschluss fiel auf dem neuen Flugplatz in Mexico-City, und zwar im letzten Augenblick (<i>Frisch</i>)	<i>My decision was taken at the new airport in Mexico City, (in actual fact) at the very last minute</i>
Ich habe die wichtigsten Museen in Wien besucht, und zwar das kunsthistorische, das naturhistorische und die Albertina	<i>I visited the most important museums in Vienna, (namely) the Museum of Art History, the Museum of Natural History and the Albertina</i>

Verbs: conjugation

[Chapters 10–16](#) deal with the forms of VERBS in German and their uses:

- [Chapter 10](#): the forms of verbs (their CONJUGATION)
- [Chapter 11](#): the INFINITIVE (e.g. *machen, schlafen*) and the PARTICIPLES (e.g. *machend, schlafend; gemacht, geschlafen*)
- [Chapter 12](#): the TENSES
- [Chapter 13](#): the PASSIVE
- [Chapter 14](#): the MOODS (especially the IMPERATIVE and the SUBJUNCTIVE)
- [Chapter 15](#): the MODAL AUXILIARY verbs (e.g. *dürfen, können, müssen*)
- [Chapter 16](#): the VALENCY of verbs (i.e. which COMPLEMENTS are needed to make a sentence)

Verbs typically express actions or activities (like *fallen, gehen, schreiben, stehlen*), processes (like *gelingen, sterben, wachsen*) or states (like *bleiben, leben, wohnen*). They constitute the core of the sentence and are usually accompanied by one or more NOUN PHRASES, i.e. the SUBJECT and the other COMPLEMENTS, as illustrated in [Table 10.1](#).

[Table 10.1](#) Subject, verb and complements

Subject	Verb	Complement(s)

Der Lehrer Ihre Freundin Die Mutter Der alte Mann	redet unterrichtet gibt wartet	Unsinn die deutsche Sprache ihrer Tochter die Tasche auf seine Frau
--	---	--

In German, verbs change their form (typically adding endings or changing the vowel) to express various grammatical ideas like **TENSE**, e.g. present and past; **MOOD**, e.g. the imperative and the subjunctive; and **PERSON** and **NUMBER**, e.g. *du* (second person singular), *wir* (first person plural). These are known as the grammatical categories of the verb. All the different forms of each verb make up its **CONJUGATION**.

This chapter gives **details on the conjugation of regular and irregular verbs** in German, as follows:

- Basic principles of the **conjugation** of verbs in German (section 10.1)
- The conjugation of the simple **present** and **past tenses** and the **imperative** (section 10.2)
- The conjugation of the **compound tenses: future** and **perfect** (section 10.3)
- The conjugation of the **passive** (section 10.4)
- The conjugation of the **subjunctive** (section 10.5)

The forms of all strong and irregular verbs are given in [Table 10.23](#), at the end of the chapter.

[10.1 Verb conjugation](#)

[10.1.1 Forms, endings and grammatical categories](#)

German verbs are usually given in dictionaries in the form of the **INFINITIVE**,

which ends in - *en* or - *n*, e.g. *kauf en*, *sing en*, *wander n*. This is the form in which verbs are usually learned by speakers of other languages.

If we take off the ending - (e)*n*, we obtain the basic core of the verb, which is called the **ROOT**, e.g. *kauf -*, *sing -*, *wander -*. The root carries the basic meaning of the verb (i.e. ‘buy’, ‘sing’ ‘wander’, etc.). By **adding endings to the root**, or by **changing its vowel**, we can show a number of different **grammatical categories** which are relevant in the sentence, as illustrated in the remainder of this section.

(a) Indicating the person and number of the subject of the verb

[Table 10.2](#) Person and number endings

	First person	Second person	Third person
Singular	ich kauf e ich sing e ich wander e	du kauf st du sing st du wander st	er/sie/es kauf t er/sie/es sing t er/sie/es wander t
Plural	wir kauf en wir sing en wir wander n	ihr kauf t ihr sing t ihr wander t	sie kauf en sie sing en sie wander n

There is a close link between a **VERB** and its **SUBJECT**. This is indicated in German by adding special endings to the verb for each **PERSON** (i.e. **first**, **second** or **third** person, see [Chapter 3](#)) according to **NUMBER** (i.e. **singular** or **plural**), as shown in [Table 10.2](#). The ‘polite’ form of the second person (see 3.3) always has the same ending on the verb as the third person plural, e.g. *Sie kaufen*, *Sie singen*, *Sie wandern*.

In this way verbs are said to **agree** with the subject. Those forms of verbs which have an ending in **AGREEMENT** with the subject like this are known as **FINITE** verbs (see 10.1.4 for more details).

(b) Indicating tense

[Table 10.3](#) Simple tenses

Present tense	Past tense
ich kaufe ich singe ich wandere	ich kauf te ich s a ng ich wander te

The various forms of the verb which **express time relationships** are known as its **TENSES**. We can add endings to the root of the verb (or change the vowel of some verbs) to show time. German, like English, has two **SIMPLE TENSES** (i.e. with a single word), the **PRESENT** tense and the **PAST** tense, as illustrated in [Table 10.3](#). The formation of these simple tenses is explained in section 10.2.

The other tenses are called **COMPOUND TENSES** because they are made up of two (or more) words, i.e. the **AUXILIARY VERBS** *haben*, *sein* or *werden* together with the **PAST PARTICIPLE** or the **INFINITIVE** of the verb, as illustrated in [Table 10.4](#). More detail on the formation of these tenses is given in section 10.3.

[Table 10.4](#) Compound tenses

Perfect tense	Pluperfect tense	Future tense
ich habe gekauft ich habe gesungen ich bin gewandert	er hatte gekauft er hatte gesungen er war gewandert	sie werden kaufen sie werden singen sie werden wandern

The use of the tenses in German is explained in detail in [Chapter 12](#).

(c) Indicating mood

The forms of the verb can show whether we are dealing with a fact, a possibility or a command, by changing the category known as the **MOOD** of the verb. German has three moods, and typical forms of each are illustrated in [Table 10.5](#).

[Table 10.5](#) Mood in German

Indicative	Subjunctive	Imperative
------------	-------------	------------

sie kauf t sie s a ng Sie werden wandern	sie kauf e sie s ä ng e Sie würden wandern	kauf e ! sing t ! wander n Sie !
---	--	---

- The INDICATIVE mood states a fact
- The SUBJUNCTIVE mood indicates a possibility or a report
- The IMPERATIVE mood expresses a command

The **indicative** is the usual mood for **statements** or **questions**, and the information about verb conjugation in sections 10.2 – 10.4 relates to the indicative mood. The formation of the subjunctive is detailed in section 10.5, and its uses are explained in [Chapter 14](#). The **imperative** mood is treated in section 14.1, together with other ways of expressing commands in German.

(d) Changing the perspective of the sentence

Using a different VOICE of the verb, i.e. the ACTIVE VOICE or the PASSIVE VOICE, allows different elements to appear as the subject of the verb and thus relates the action from a different perspective.

[Table 10.6](#) Active and passive

Active	werden-passive	sein-passive
Sie schickt die Mail ab Er verkaufte das Buch	Die Mail wird abgeschickt Das Buch wurde verkauft	Die Mail ist abgeschickt Das Buch war verkauft

German has **two forms** of the **passive voice**, as illustrated in [Table 10.6](#). These are formed by using the auxiliary verb **werden** (the *werden* -passive), or the auxiliary verb **sein** (the *sein*- passive) with a past participle.

For details about the conjugation of the passive, see 10.4, and the uses of the two passive forms are explained in [Chapter 13](#).

(e) The non-finite forms of the verb

[Table 10.7](#) Non-finite forms of the verb

Infinitive	Present participle	Past participle
kauf en sing en wander n	kauf end sing end wander nd	ge kauf t ge sung en ge wander t

The NON-FINITE forms of the verb are the INFINITIVE, the PRESENT PARTICIPLE and the PAST PARTICIPLE, as illustrated in [Table 10.7](#). Unlike the **finite** forms of the verb (see (a) above) these non-finite forms are fixed and **they do not agree with the subject of the verb**.

They can be combined with **auxiliary verbs** to form the **compound tenses** and the **passive voice** (see 10.3 – 10.4), and they have other uses which are explained in [Chapter 11](#).

10.1.2 ‘Weak’ and ‘strong’ verbs

There are two main types of CONJUGATION for verbs in German, conventionally known as the WEAK and STRONG conjugations. The main difference between these is the way in which the **past tense** is formed:

- **WEAK** verbs form their past tense by adding - *te* to the root:

kauf-en mach-en wander-n	kauf- te mach- te wander- te
--------------------------------	---

- **STRONG** verbs form their past tense by changing the vowel of the root:

flieg-en greif-en sing-en	fl o g gr i ff s a ng
---------------------------------	--

Most German verbs follow the ‘weak’ conjugation. In practice these are the regular verbs.

There are far fewer strong verbs, but many of them are very common, so that half the verbs in a typical text will be strong. There is no way of telling from the infinitive of a verb whether it is weak or strong and **foreign learners need to learn which verbs are strong**, together with their three most important forms, the PRINCIPAL PARTS, as illustrated in [Table 10.8](#). These are the **infinitive**, the **past tense** and the **past participle**, and all the other forms can be built up from these three basic forms.

[Table 10.8](#) Principal parts of strong verbs

Infinitive	Past tense	Past participle
bleiben	blieb	geblieben
singen	sang	gesungen
fahren	fuhr	gefahren

The principal parts of all strong and irregular verbs are given in [Table 10.23](#).

In practice, the **vowel changes** in most strong verbs (called *ABLAUT* in German) follow a small number of **recurrent patterns**. For example, fourteen verbs have the same pattern as *bleiben*, i.e.:

bleiben – blieb – geblieben

It is useful to be aware of these patterns, which are shown in [Table 10.9](#).

[Table 10.9](#) Vowel changes in strong verbs

Vowel change	Example
ei – ie – ie	bleiben – blieb – geblieben
ei – i – i	greifen – griff – gegriffen
i – a – u	singen – sang – gesungen
i – a – o	schwimmen – schwamm – geschwommen
ie – o – o	fliegen – flog – geflogen
e – a – o	helfen – half – geholfen

e – a – e	geben – gab – gegeben
e – o – o	fechten – focht – gefochten
a – u – a	fahren – fuhr – gefahren
a – ie – a	fallen – fiel – gefallen

10.1.3 Irregular verbs

A few verbs do not follow the usual weak or strong conjugation but have irregular forms. There are **four groups** of these **irregular verbs**.

(a) Irregular weak verbs

There are a few verbs which have the usual endings of weak verbs in the past tense and the past participle, but with **vowel changes** (and sometimes also **consonant changes**) in addition, e.g.:

kennen – k a nnte – gek a nnt	rennen – r a nnte – ger a nnt
bringen – br ach te – gebr ach t	denken – d ach te – ged ach t

The principal parts of all irregular weak verbs are given in [Table 10.23](#).

(b) Irregular strong verbs

A few strong verbs have **consonant changes** as well as vowel changes in the past tense and the past participle, e.g.:

gehen – g ing – geg ang en	leiden – l itt – gel itt en
stehen – st and – gest and en	ziehen – z og – gez og en

The principal parts of all irregular strong verbs are given in [Table 10.23](#).

(c) The modal auxiliary verbs and *wissen*

The six MODAL AUXILIARY verbs *dürfe n*, *könne n*, *möge n*, *müsse n*, *sollen*, *wollen*, and the verb *wissen* ‘know’ have an **irregular present tense** with no ending in the third person singular and, in most cases, a different vowel in the singular and plural. Most of them also have vowel changes in the past tense and the past participle:

können	er k a nn, wir k ö nnen	k o nnte	gek o nnt
müssen	er m u ss, wir m ü ssen	m u sste	gem u sst
wissen	er w ei ß, wir w i ssen	w u sste	gew u sst

All the forms of these verbs in the indicative tenses are given in [Table 10.12](#), and the uses of the modal auxiliaries are explained in [Chapter 15](#).

(d) The verbs *haben*, *sein* and *werden*

These three verbs are wholly irregular and their indicative forms are given in [Table 10.11](#). Aside from their basic meanings, i.e. *haben* ‘have’, *sein* ‘be’, *werden* ‘become’, they are used as AUXILIARY VERBS to form the compound tenses and the passives.

10.1.4 Agreement of subject and finite verb

As explained in 10.1.1a and illustrated in [Table 10.2](#), finite verbs have endings in agreement with the **person** and **number** of the **subject**. However, there are some contexts where there can be uncertainty, especially if the subject is not a noun phrase or there is doubt whether the subject is singular or plural.

(a) If the subject of the verb is a clause, the verb has the third person singular endings

The clause can be a subordinate clause (see 17.2) or an infinitive clause (see 11.2.2):

Dass sie nichts tut, **ärgert** mich
sehr
Sie wiederzusehen **hat** mich
gefreut

*I'm very annoyed that she isn't doing
anything
I was pleased to see her again*

(b) If the verb *sein* is followed by a noun in the plural

In these contexts the verb has a plural ending even if the subject is singular:

Mein Lieblingsobst **sind** Kirschen *My favourite fruit is cherries*

This is in particular the case with *es*, *das* and other neuter pronouns (see 3.6.2b, 5.1.1h and 5.3.1a):

Was **sind** das für große Vögel? – Es
sind Störche
Sind es deine Handschuhe?
Welches **sind** deine Handschuhe?

*What kind of large birds are those? –
They are storks
Are they your gloves?
Which are your gloves?*

(c) If the subject consists of a series of linked nouns, the verb is usually plural

Helmut und sein Bruder **sind**
gekommen
Vater, Mutter, Tochter **saßen**
beim Essen

*Helmut and his brother have come
Father, mother and daughter were sitting down
to a meal*

However, there are some contexts where it is possible to use a singular ending (although this is still less common than the plural ending).

(i) if the subject follows the verb:

Im Osten **winkte** das
Völkerschlachtdenkmal, die Türme
und die Essen von Leipzig

*In the East, the memorial to the Battle of
1813, the towers and chimneys of Leipzig
beckoned*

(ii) if the parts of the subject are seen as separate or distinct (this is especially the case if the nouns are qualified by *jeder* or *kein*):

Wenig später wurde heiße Suppe und Weißbrot ausgeteilt	<i>A little later hot soup and white bread were distributed</i>
Ihm konnte kein Arzt und kein Apotheker mehr helfen	<i>No doctor or chemist could help him now</i>

(iii) if the linked nouns are felt to form a single whole:

Diese Haltung und Miene war ihm eigentümlich (<i>Th. Mann</i>)	<i>This attitude and facial expression were peculiar to him</i>
--	---

(iv) with the conjunctions *sowie* and *sowohl ... als/wie (auch)*, see 17.1.4:

Sowohl Manfred als auch seine Frau war einverstanden	<i>Both Manfred and his wife agreed</i>
--	---

(d) If the subject consists of nouns linked by a disjunctive conjunction

i.e. a conjunction with the meaning 'or'. The verb is then most often in the singular.

(i) This applies in particular to (*entweder ...*) *oder* and *nicht (nur) ..., sondern (auch)*

Entweder Hans oder Karl wird mir helfen	<i>Either Hans or Karl will help me</i>
Mit dieser Lösung wäre nicht nur die Mehrheit der Partei, sondern auch Stöber selbst zufrieden gewesen	<i>Not only the majority of the party but Stöber too would have been satisfied with this solution</i>

A plural verb is sometimes used with these, especially if the nearest noun is plural, e.g. *Entweder Karl oder seine Brüder **werden** mir helfen.*

(ii) With *weder ... noch*, either a singular or a plural verb is possible, but the plural is more frequent:

In Berlin **waren** sich weder Kabinett
noch Regierungsfractionen einig

*In Berlin neither the cabinet nor the
governing parties were agreed*

(e) If a coordinated subject includes a pronoun

In these contexts the verb has the ending corresponding to the combination, i.e. first, second or third person plural.

(i) This applies in particular with the conjunction *und* and its synonyms:

Mein Mann und ich (= wir) **trennten** uns im
Frühjahr (*Spiegel*)

Du und sie (= ihr) **könnt** damit zufrieden sein
Sowohl sie als auch er (= sie) **haben** sich
darüber gefreut

*My husband and I separated in
the spring*

*You and she can be satisfied
with that*

*Both she and he were pleased
about it*

These combinations can sound artificial, especially if the second person plural *ihr* is involved, and they are often avoided by rephrasing the sentence and adding the appropriate plural pronoun, e.g. *Ihr könnt damit zufrieden sein, du und sie*.

(ii) With disjunctive conjunctions (i.e. those meaning 'or'), the verb usually agrees with the nearest pronoun, whether this precedes or follows:

Entweder du oder ich **werde** es ihnen sagen

Nicht ich, sondern ihr **sollt** es ihnen sagen

Dann **werden** nicht nur sie, sondern auch ihr es ihnen sagen

Ich, nicht du, **sollst** es ihnen sagen

These, too, can sound unnatural, and can be avoided by repeating the verb or splitting one pronoun off, e.g.:

Entweder du **sagst** es ihnen, oder ich **sage** es ihnen

Entweder du **sollst** es ihr sagen **oder** ich

(f) Usage with expressions of measure or quantity

(i) With singular nouns of indefinite quantity followed by a plural noun, the verb is often plural:

Ein Dutzend Eier kosten 2 Euro	<i>A dozen eggs cost 2 euros</i>
In Canary Wharf arbeiten eine Menge Leute, die sich solche Wagen leisten können (BZ)	A lot of people who can afford cars like that work in Canary Wharf
Eine Gruppe von Studenten standen vor dem Bahnhof	A group of students were standing in front of the station
Die Hälfte meiner Gedanken waren bei ihr (Grass)	<i>Half my thoughts were with her</i>

This is the predominant usage in speech and common in writing, although the singular is not unusual, especially in writing, e.g. *ein Dutzend Eier **kostet** 2 Euro* or *Die Hälfte meiner Gedanken **war** bei ihr*, and some authorities continue to insist that only this is correct.

(ii) With singular measurement words followed by a plural noun, the verb can be either singular or plural, although in practice the singular is rather more frequent:

Ein Kilogramm Kartoffeln **reicht** (**reichen**) aus

Ein Kubikmeter Ziegelsteine **wiegt** (**wiegen**) fast zwei Tonnen

(iii) With nouns of measurement used with a numeral or with a plural determiner, the verb is normally in the plural, although in such cases, masculine and neuter nouns of measurement have no plural ending (see 1.2.8):

Mehrere Liter Benzin waren verschüttet	<i>Several litres of petrol were spilled</i>
Fünf Kilo kosten fünfzehn Euro	Five kilograms cost fifteen euros
Dafür wurden mir tausend Euro angeboten	I was offered a thousand euros for it <i>80% of the population was opposed to</i>

80 Prozent der Bevölkerung **waren**
dagegen

it

However, a singular ending is often used in such contexts, especially in spoken German, as the quantity is thought of as a single whole: *Zwanzig Euro **ist** / **sind** zu viel; 80 Prozent der Bevölkerung **war** / **waren** dagegen.*

(g) Singular collective nouns are used with a singular verb

This contrasts strongly with English (especially British English), where the plural is frequent (or with some nouns, like *police*, the only possibility), and English-speaking learners need to pay careful attention to German usage in such contexts:

Die ganze Familie **ist** verreist
Unsere Mannschaft **hat** wieder verloren
Die Polizei **kommt** gleich
Die Regierung **hat** es beschlossen

The whole family have/has gone away
Our team have/has lost again
The police are coming straight away
The government have/has decided it

(h) Agreement of neuter indefinites and pronouns with the verb *sein*

The neuter indefinites and pronouns *es*, *das*, *welches*, *wer*, *was* and *beides* can be used with singular or plural forms of *sein*, which in effect agrees with the predicate complement, e.g.:

Das **ist** mein Buch
Das **sind** meine Bücher

That is my book
Those are my books

See 3.6.2b, 5.1.1h, 5.3.1a, 5.3.3b and 5.5.3d for examples with various pronouns.

10.2 The simple tenses, the non-finite forms and the imperative

The forms of the simple present and past tenses, the imperative and non-finite forms (i.e. the participles and the infinitive) make up the basic conjugation of the German verb. They are all single words, formed by adding different prefixes or suffixes to the verb root, or by changing the form of the root, especially by altering the vowel.

10.2.1 Weak and strong verbs

As explained in 10.1.2, weak and strong verbs differ mainly in the way in which they form the past tense and the past participle (their ‘principal parts’). Weak verbs have the ending *-te* in the past tense and *-t* in the past participle, while strong verbs change the vowel of the root in the past tense and have the ending *-en* (sometimes with a further change of vowel) in the past participle.

Otherwise, both weak and strong verbs have the same endings in the two simple tenses and in the imperative in agreement with the subject of the verb (see 10.1.1a), and the same prefixes and suffixes in the non-finite forms. [Table 10.10](#) gives these forms for typical weak and strong verbs. The principal parts of all strong and irregular verbs are given in [Table 10.23](#).

[Table 10.10](#) Basic verb conjugation – the simple forms

	Weak			Strong
Infinitive Present participle Past participle	kaufen kaufend gekauft	warten wartend gewartet	wandern wandernd gewandert	singen singend gesungen
Present tense	ich kaufe du kaufst es kauft wir kaufen ihr kauft Sie kaufen sie kaufen	ich warte du wartest es wartet wir warten ihr wartet Sie warten sie warten	ich wand(e)re du wanderst es wandert wir wandern ihr wandert Sie wandern sie wandern	ich singe du singst es singt wir singen ihr singt Sie singen sie singen
Past tense	ich kaufte du kauftest es kaufte wir kauften ihr kauftet Sie kauften sie kauften	ich wartete du wartetest es wartete wir warteten ihr wartetet Sie warteten sie warteten	ich wanderte du wandertest es wanderte wir wanderten ihr wandertet Sie wanderten sie wanderten	ich sang du sangst es sang wir sangen ihr sangt Sie sangen sie sangen
Imperative singular plural (familiar) plural (polite)	kauf(e)! kauft! kaufen Sie!	warte! wartet! warten Sie!	wand(e)re! wandert! wandern Sie!	sing(e)! singt! singen Sie!

There are a few regular variations to the pattern of endings given in [Table 10.10](#)

(a) Verbs whose root ends in - *d* or - *t*, or in - *m* or - *n* after a consonant

These verbs add - *e* - before the endings - *t*, - *s t*, and the - *t e* of the past tense of weak verbs: *du arbeit est*, *er arbeit et*, *er arbeit ete*, *gearbeit et*, etc. The forms of **warten** 'wait' are given in [Table 10.10](#) as illustration. Other examples:

finden <i>find</i>	du find e st, er find e t, ihr find e t; ihr fand e t
regnen <i>rain</i>	es regn e t, es regn e te, geregn et
atmen <i>breathe</i>	du atm e st, sie atm e t, ihr atm e t, ich atm e te, geatm e t

(i) These verbs always have the ending - *e* in the **imperative singular**: *arbeite!*, *finde!*, *warte!*

(ii) - *e* - is not added in the second person singular of the past tense of strong

verbs: *du fandst*.

(iii) Verbs with *l* or *r* before *m* or *n* have no linking - *e* -: *sie filmt* 'she is filming', *er lernt* 'he is learning'.

(iv) Some strong verbs with a vowel change do not add -*et* in the third person singular of the present tense, see (e) and (f) below.

(b) Verbs whose root ends in - *s*, - *ß*, - *x* or - *z*

(i) These simply add the ending - *t* in the second person singular of the present tense:

rasen <i>race</i> – du rast	grüßen <i>greet</i> – du grüßt	faxen <i>fax</i> – du faxt	sitzen <i>sit</i> – du sitzt
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The use of the ending - *est* with these verbs, e.g. *du sitz **est***, is archaic, except in Swiss usage.

(ii) Strong verbs in - *s*, - *ß*, or - *z* add -*e*- before the ending -*st* in the second person singular of the past tense:

lesen *read* – du **lasest** heißen *be called* – du **hieße****st**

sitzen *sit* – du **saße****st** wachsen *grow* – du **wuchse****st**

(iii) With these strong verbs, - *e* - was added in older usage before the ending -*t* of the second person plural of the past tense, e.g. *ihr laset*. However, the shorter ending - *t*, e.g. *ihr last*, is now usual.

(c) Verbs whose root ends in -*el* and -*er*

These verbs have a few endings with slight differences from the general pattern, as illustrated by the forms of **wandern** given in [Table 10.10](#).

(i) They have the ending - *n* in the infinitive, and the first and third person plural of the present tense, e.g. *klingel n* ‘ring’, *wander n* ‘wander’.

(ii) In the first person singular of the present tense and the imperative singular, the - *e*- of the root is always dropped with verbs in - *el* and often with verbs in - *er* (more commonly in speech than in writing), e.g. *ich kling le*, *ich wand (e)re*.

(iii) In spoken German forms are heard in the first person singular of the present tense where the - *e* - of the root is kept, but the - *e* of the ending dropped, e.g. *ich klingel*, *ich wander*, etc.

(d) Verbs whose root ends in a long vowel or diphthong

These sometimes drop - *e* - in their endings, in particular:

(i) In the present tense and infinitive of ***tun*** ‘do’, i.e.:

ich tue, du tust, es tut, wir tu **n**, ihr tut, sie tu **n**

(ii) The present tense of *knien* [kni:ə n] ‘kneel’ is as follows (see also 21.4.2a):

ich knie [kni:ə], du kniest [kni:st], er kniet [kni:t],

wir knien [kni: ə n], ihr kniet [kni:t], sie knien [kni: ə n]

(iii) The past tense of the strong verb ***schreien*** ‘shout, scream’ is similar, i.e.:

ich/er schrie, wir/sie schrien [ʃ ri: ə n]

The past participle is *geschrieen* or *geschrien*.

(iv) Other verbs with a root ending in a long vowel or diphthong typically drop the - *e* - of the ending - ***en*** in spoken German, e.g. *schaun*, *gehn*, *gesehn* (for *schauen*, *gehen*, *gesehen*). These forms are occasionally used in writing, especially in dialogue.

(e) Strong verbs with the vowel - *e* - in their root

Most of these verbs **change - *e* - to - *i* - or - *ie* -** in the second and third person singular present, and in the imperative singular. Full details of all these changes are given with the individual verb in [Table 10.23](#). In general, verbs with **short - *e*** - [e] change this to short - *i* -, while those in **long - *e*** - [e:] usually change this to - *ie* -, e.g.:

essen <i>eat</i>	du <i>i</i> sst, es <i>i</i> sst, <i>i</i> ss!
helfen <i>help</i>	du <i>h i</i> lfst, es <i>h i</i> lft, <i>h i</i> lf!
lesen <i>read</i>	du <i>l ie</i> st, es <i>l ie</i> st, <i>l ie</i> s!
stehlen <i>steal</i>	du <i>st ie</i> hlst, es <i>st ie</i> hlt, <i>st ie</i> hl!

There are a few exceptions to these changes, and a few minor differences with some verbs.

(i) The following strong verbs in -*e*- do not change the vowel to - *i* - or - *ie* -:

bewegen <i>induce</i>	gehen <i>go</i>	genesen <i>recover</i>	heben <i>lift</i>
melken <i>milk</i>	scheren <i>shear</i>	stehen <i>stand</i>	weben <i>weave</i>

(ii) *erlöschen* ‘go out’ (of lights, fires) changes -*ö*- to -*i*-: *es erl i scht*

(iii) Three strong verbs which have long -*e*- in their root change this to short -*i*- rather than long -*ie*-:

geben <i>give</i>	du <i>g i</i> bst, es <i>g i</i> bt, <i>g i</i> b!
nehmen <i>take</i>	du <i>n i</i> mmst, es <i>n i</i> mmt, <i>n i</i> mm!
treten <i>step</i>	du <i>tr i</i> ttst, es <i>tr i</i> tt, <i>tr i</i> tt!

(iv) Verbs with this vowel change whose root ends in -*d* or -*t* do not add an ending in the third person singular of the present tense:

gelten *be worth* es *g i l t* treten *step* es *tr itt*

(v) In colloquial speech, imperative forms without the vowel change are frequent,

e.g. *ess!*, *geb!*, *nehm!* These are considered incorrect.

(f) Strong verbs with *-a-* or *-au-* in their root

Most of these verbs have ***Umlaut*** in the second and third person singular of the present:

fahren <i>go</i>	du f ä hrst, es f ä hrt
lassen <i>let</i>	du l ä sst, es l ä sst
wachsen <i>grow</i>	du w ä chst, es w ä chst
laufen <i>run</i>	du l ä u fst, es l ä u ft

Full details of all these changes are given with the individual verb in [Table 10.23](#). There are some exceptions and further irregularities:

(i) *stoßen* ‘push’ has *Umlaut* of *-o-*: *du stößt, es stößt*

(ii) *schaffen* ‘create’ and *saugen* ‘suck’ do not have *Umlaut*: *du schaffst, saugst, er schafft, saugt*

(iii) Verbs whose root ends in *-d* or *-t* do not add an ending in the third person singular of the present tense, e.g.:

halten *hold* es h ä l t laden *load* es l ä dt raten *advise* es r ä t

In spoken South German, *Umlaut* is often lacking with these verbs, and one hears, for example, *sie schlaft* instead of *sie schläft*. This is a non-standard regionalism.

(g) The imperative singular ending *-e*

(i) The ending is optional with most verbs, e.g.:

Komm(e) in den Garten! Setz(e) dich! Stör(e) mich nicht!

It is usually dropped in speech, but quite commonly used in written German.

(ii) Strong verbs with a vowel change never have the ending: *Lies! Gib! Nimm!*

(iii) Verbs with roots ending in - *ig*, and - *m* or - *n* after another consonant always keep the ending -*e*:

Entschuldige bitte! Segne mich! Atme langsam!

(iv) Verbs in - *el* (see (c) above) drop the - *e* - of the root, but keep the ending: *Kling le laut!*

(h) The past participle prefix *ge-*

As shown in [Table 10.10](#), most verbs have the PREFIX *ge-* in the past participle, e.g. *gekauft*, *gewandert*, *gewartet*, *gesungen*. However, verbs which are not stressed on the first syllable have no prefix. These fall into three groups.

(i) Verbs with inseparable prefixes (see 20.5):

bedeuten <i>mean</i>	bedeutet	misslingen <i>fail</i>	misslungen
erfinden <i>invent</i>	erfunden	überlegen <i>consider</i>	überlegt
gelingen <i>succeed</i>	gelungen	unterdrücken <i>suppress</i>	unterdrückt
anvertrauen <i>entrust</i>	anvertraut	zerbrechen <i>smash</i>	zerbrochen

(ii) Verbs in - *ieren*:

gratulieren <i>congratulate</i>	gratuliert	studieren <i>study</i>	studiert
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(iii) A few other verbs which are not stressed on the first syllable:

frohlocken <i>rejoice</i>	frohlockt	prophezeien <i>prophecy</i>	prophezeit
interviewen <i>interview</i>	interviewt	recykeln <i>recycle</i>	recykelt
liebkoosen <i>caress</i>	liebkost	schmarotzen <i>sponge</i>	schmarotzt
offenbaren <i>reveal</i>	offenbart		stibitzt

posaunen *bellow*

posaunt

stibitzen *nick, pinch*

Some of these verbs can, alternatively, be pronounced with the first syllable stressed, and in this case the past participle has the prefix *ge-*:

'frohlocken – ge'frohlockt 'liebkosten – ge'liebkost 'offenbaren – ge'offenbart

(i) Separable verbs

Separable verbs are made by adding a PREFIX to a simple verb to form a new verb with a distinctive meaning (as explained in 20.6). These verbs are called SEPARABLE VERBS because this prefix is separated from the main verb in certain contexts. Separable verbs have exactly the same endings and forms, whether weak or strong, as the simple verbs from which they are derived. Thus, *ankommen* 'arrive' conjugates like *kommen*, *zumachen* 'shut' like *machen*.

(i) In main clauses, the prefix is separated from the verb and is placed at the end of the clause (see also 19.1.1a):

an kommen <i>arrive</i> :	Ich komme morgen um zwei Uhr an . Ich kam gestern an
aus gehen <i>go out</i> :	Sie geht heute Abend aus
nach ahmen <i>imitate</i> :	Sie ahmten seine Bewegungen nach
tot schlagen <i>kill</i> :	Er schlug das Tier mit einer Keule tot

(ii) The prefix remains joined to the verb in all the non-finite forms. The *ge-* of the past participle is inserted **between the prefix and the verb**:

ankommen – ankommend – an **ge** kommen

ausgehen – ausgehend – aus **ge** gangen

ausmachen – ausmachend – aus **ge** macht

vorstellen – vorstellend – vor **ge** stellt

If the simple verb has no *ge-* in the past participle (see (h) above), it is also

lacking in all corresponding separable verbs:

einstudieren *rehearse* – einstudiert

anerkennen *recognize* – anerkannt

The **zu** of the expanded infinitive (see 11.1.2b) is also inserted between the prefix and the verb:

ankommen – an **zu** kommen ausgehen – aus **zu** gehen anerkennen – an **zu** erkennen

(iii) In subordinate clauses (see 19.1.1c), the prefix rejoins the finite verb in final position:

Ich weiß, dass sie heute Abend **ausgeht**

Er sah, wie sie seine Bewegungen **nachahmten**

(j) Forms in everyday speech

Some verb forms which are typical of spoken German differ from those which are usual in writing. Although the norm in informal registers, they are considered non-standard colloquialisms and usually avoided in writing and other more formal registers.

(i) Final - *e* tends to be dropped in all endings, e.g.:

ich kauf, ich hätt, ich fall, er/sie sucht *for* ich kaufe, ich hätte, ich falle, er/sie suchte

If this form is used in written German, for instance to give the impression of informal usage, the missing ending is often indicated by an apostrophe, e.g. *ich kauf'*, *ich hätt'*.

(ii) The ending - *en* tends to be reduced to - *n*, e.g. *wir kaufn*, *sie falln*, *wir kauftn*, *sie botn*, *getretn*

(iii) Especially in North and Central Germany, the verb *brauchen* is used in

colloquial speech with no ending in the third person singular of the present tense, e.g. *er / sie brauch*. Although frequent, this usage is considered quite incorrect.

(k) Recent loan words from English

Many English verbs are simply taken over as German roots and the usual regular prefixes and endings of weak verbs are simply added to this, e.g.:

surfen *surf (the web)* – Oliver sitzt am Computer und surft durchs Internet

mailen *e-mail* – Hast du ihr gestern gemailt?

simsen *send a text message* – sie simst ihren Freunden dauernd

Kinder und Jugendliche bewegen sich heute fast unbeschränkt auf der ganzen Welt – der virtuellen Welt. Sie „googlen“, „surfen“, „chatten“, „twittern“, „skypen“, „mailen“, „bloggen“, „gamen“ und so fort (SGT)

Some English verbs are less easy to convert into a German root, in which case partly English spellings can be used, e.g. *Dieses Bild wurde schon hundertmal geliked*.

10.2.2 Irregular verbs

The verbs ***sein*** ‘be’, ***haben*** ‘have’, ***werden*** ‘become’, the six modal auxiliary verbs *dürfen*, *können*, *mögen*, *müssen*, *sollen*, *wollen* and the verb ***wissen*** ‘know’ are wholly irregular in their conjugation.

(a) The conjugation of ***sein***, ***haben*** and ***werden*** is given in [Table 10.11](#)

Further information:

(i) Reduced forms of ***sein*** and ***haben*** are usual in everyday spoken German, e.g.:

es is (for *es ist*) **wir/sie sin**, **ham** (for *wir/sie sind*, *haben*) **simmer**, **hammer**

(for *sind wir*, *haben wir*)

(ii) Special forms of **werden**

The old form *ich/es ward* was sometimes used for *ich/es wurde* in elevated styles into the twentieth century, and it is still occasionally found in deliberately archaicizing (especially biblical) contexts.

The past participle of *werden* has no *ge* - when used as an auxiliary to form the passive, see 10.4, e.g. *Er ist gelobt worden*. Compare its use as a full verb meaning ‘become’: *Er ist Schauspieler geworden*.

[Table 10.11](#) Conjugation of *sein*, *haben*, *werden*

Infinitive	sein	haben	werden
Present participle	seiend	habend	werdend
Past participle	gewesen	gehabt	geworden
Present tense	ich bin du bist es ist wir sind ihr seid Sie sind sie sind	ich habe du hast es hat wir haben ihr habt Sie haben sie haben	ich werde du wirst es wird wir werden ihr werdet Sie werden sie werden
Past tense	ich war du warst es war wir waren ihr wart Sie waren sie waren	ich hatte du hattest es hatte wir hatten ihr hattet Sie hatten sie hatten	ich wurde du wurdest es wurde wir wurden ihr wurdet Sie wurden sie wurden
Imperative singular plural (familiar) plural (polite)	sei! seid! seien Sie!	hab! habt! haben Sie!	werde! werdet! werden Sie!

(b) The conjugation of the modal auxiliaries and *wissen* is given in

Table 10.12

Further information:

(i) The past participle of the modal auxiliaries is rarely used. When these verbs are used in the perfect tenses in conjunction with a main verb, the infinitive is used rather than the past participle (see 11.3.2):

Ich habe es machen **müssen** Sie hatte es sehen **können**

Wir haben ihn lehren **sollen** Sie hatten es uns sagen **wollen**

(ii) The present participle and imperative of the modal auxiliaries are not used. Those of *wissen* are regular, i.e. present participle: *wissend*; imperative: *wisse!* *wisst!* *wissen Sie!*

Table 10.12 Conjugation of the modal auxiliary verbs and *wissen*

Infinitive		<i>dürfen</i>	<i>können</i>	<i>mögen</i>	<i>müssen</i>	<i>sollen</i>	<i>wollen</i>	<i>wissen</i>
Present tense	ich	darf	kann	mag	muss	soll	will	weiß
	du	darfst	kannst	magst	musst	sollst	willst	weißt
	es	darf	kann	mag	muss	soll	will	weiß
	wir	dürfen	können	mögen	müssen	sollen	wollen	wissen
	ihr	dürft	könnt	mögt	müsst	sollt	wollt	wisst
	Sie	dürfen	können	mögen	müssen	sollen	wollen	wissen
	sie	dürfen	können	mögen	müssen	sollen	wollen	wissen
Past tense	ich	durfte	konnte	mochte	musste	sollte	wollte	wusste
	du	durftest	konntest	mochtest	musstest	solltest	wolltest	wusstest
	es	durfte	konnte	mochte	musste	sollte	wollte	wusste
	wir	durften	konnten	mochten	mussten	sollten	wollten	wussten
	ihr	durftet	konntet	mochtet	musstet	solltet	wolltet	wusstet
	Sie	durften	konnten	mochten	mussten	sollten	wollten	wussten
	sie	durften	konnten	mochten	mussten	sollten	wollten	wussten
Past participle		gedurft	gekonnt	gemocht	gemusst	gesollt	gewollt	gewusst

10.3 The compound tenses

10.3.1 The conjugation of the verb in the compound tenses

(a) The perfect and future are formed with the auxiliary verbs *sein*, *haben* and *werden*

The perfect tenses are formed with the past participle and *haben* or *sein*, and the future tense is constructed using *werden* and the infinitive, e.g.:

perfect:	ich habe gekauft <i>I have bought</i>	ich bin gekommen <i>I have come</i>
pluperfect:	ich hatte gekauft <i>I had bought</i>	ich war gekommen <i>I had come</i>
future:	ich werde kaufen <i>I shall/will buy</i>	ich werde kommen <i>I shall/will</i>
future perfect:	ich werde gekauft haben <i>I shall/will have bought</i>	come ich werde gekommen sein <i>I shall/will have come</i>

Full forms of all these tenses are given in [Table 10.13](#) for the weak verb *machen* ‘make’ and the strong verb *singen* ‘sing’, which form their perfect tenses with the auxiliary *haben*, and for the strong verb *bleiben* ‘remain’ which forms its perfect tenses with the auxiliary *sein* (see 10.3.2). The uses of the tenses are explained in detail in [Chapter 12](#).

(b) The non-finite parts of compound tenses

i.e. the past participle in the perfect tenses and the infinitive in the future. These are placed at the **end of the clause** in main clauses and make up the final part of the VERBAL BRACKET (see 19.1.2), e.g. *Ich **habe** sie gestern in der Stadt **gesehen***. In subordinate clauses the auxiliary usually follows the non-finite part at the end of the clause, see 19.1.3, e.g. *Sie wissen, dass ich sie gestern in der Stadt **gesehen** habe*.

[Table 10.13](#) Compound tenses of strong and weak verbs

	with <i>haben</i>						with <i>sein</i>			
Perfect	ich	habe	gemacht		habe	gesungen		bin	geblieben	
	du	hast	gemacht		hast	gesungen		bist	geblieben	
	es	hat	gemacht		hat	gesungen		ist	geblieben	
	wir	haben	gemacht		haben	gesungen		sind	geblieben	
	ihr	habt	gemacht		habt	gesungen		seid	geblieben	
	Sie	haben	gemacht		haben	gesungen		sind	geblieben	
	sie	haben	gemacht		haben	gesungen		sind	geblieben	
Pluperfect	ich	hatte	gemacht		hatte	gesungen		war	geblieben	
	du	hattest	gemacht		hattest	gesungen		warst	geblieben	
	es	hatte	gemacht		hatte	gesungen		war	geblieben	
	wir	hatten	gemacht		hatten	gesungen		waren	geblieben	
	ihr	hattet	gemacht		hattet	gesungen		wart	geblieben	
	Sie	hatten	gemacht		hatten	gesungen		waren	geblieben	
	sie	hatten	gemacht		hatten	gesungen		waren	geblieben	
Future	ich	werde	machen		werde	singen		werde	bleiben	
	du	wirst	machen		wirst	singen		wirst	bleiben	
	es	wird	machen		wird	singen		wird	bleiben	
	wir	werden	machen		werden	singen		werden	bleiben	
	ihr	werdet	machen		werdet	singen		werdet	bleiben	
	Sie	werden	machen		werden	singen		werden	bleiben	
	sie	werden	machen		werden	singen		werden	bleiben	
Future perfect	ich	werde	gemacht	haben	werde	gesungen	haben	werde	geblieben	sein
	du	wirst	gemacht	haben	wirst	gesungen	haben	wirst	geblieben	sein
	es	wird	gemacht	haben	wird	gesungen	haben	wird	geblieben	sein
	wir	werden	gemacht	haben	werden	gesungen	haben	werden	geblieben	sein
	ihr	werdet	gemacht	haben	werdet	gesungen	haben	werdet	geblieben	sein
	Sie	werden	gemacht	haben	werden	gesungen	haben	werden	geblieben	sein
	sie	werden	gemacht	haben	werden	gesungen	haben	werden	geblieben	sein

10.3.2 *haben* and *sein* in the perfect

The perfect tenses are constructed using one of the AUXILIARY VERBS ***haben*** or ***sein***. Which one is used depends on the meaning of the verb.

(a) The following groups of verbs form their perfect with ***sein***

All these verbs are INTRANSITIVE, i.e. they do not have a direct object in the accusative case (see 16.3):

(i) Intransitive verbs of motion:

Ich **bin** in die Stadt gegangen

Sie **war** zum Boden gefallen

Wir **sind** aus dem Haus entkommen
Um die Zeit werden wir schon
angekommen **sein**

Ihr **wart** auf die Mauer geklettert
Wir **waren** aber schon nach Zwickau
gefahren

Some verbs of motion take *sein* or *haben* in different contexts, see (c) below.

(ii) Intransitive verbs expressing a **change of state**. This group includes a large number of verbs which point to the beginning or end of a process, including many with the prefixes *er-* and *ver-* (see 20.5):

Sie **ist** schon eingeschlafen
Die Bombe **ist** um zwei Uhr explodiert
Das Licht **ist** ausgegangen
Mein Buch **ist** verschwunden
Die Glocke **ist** erkungen

Die Blumen **sind** verwelkt
Der Reifen **war** geplatzt
Der Schnee **war** schon geschmolzen
Sie werden gleich danach ertrunken **sein**

In colloquial North German, *anfangen* and *beginnen* form their perfect with *sein*. One thus hears *ich bin angefangen*, *begonnen* for standard German *ich habe angefangen*, *begonnen*.

(iii) Most verbs meaning ‘**happen**’, ‘**succeed**’, ‘**fail**’, i.e.:

begegnen <i>meet</i> (by chance)	fehlschlagen <i>fail</i>	gelingen <i>succeed</i>	
glücken <i>succeed</i>	missglücken <i>fail</i>	misslingen <i>fail</i>	geschehen <i>happen</i>
vorgehen <i>happen</i>	vorkommen <i>occur</i>	zustoßen <i>happen</i>	passieren <i>happen</i>

Ich **bin** ihr gestern begegnet
Der Plan **ist** fehlgeschlagen
Es **war** mir gelungen, ihn zu überzeugen

Das **war** schon einmal vorgekommen
Was wird mit ihr passiert **sein** ?

The colloquial verb *klappen* ‘succeed’ takes *haben*, e.g. **Hat’s** mit den Karten geklappt? ‘Did you manage to get the tickets?’

(iv) The verbs ***sein*** and ***bleiben***:

Sie **ist** früher Lehrerin gewesen
War er mal Diplomat gewesen?

Wir **sind** in Dessau geblieben
Sie wird dort geblieben **sein**

(b) All other verbs form their perfect tenses with *haben*

This includes the majority of German verbs. The most important fall into the following groups:

(i) TRANSITIVE VERBS, i.e. those which have a direct object in the accusative case (see 16.3):

Ich **habe** sie gesehen

Er **hat** die Wohnung geputzt

Der Hund **hatte** die Mülltonne umgeworfen

Sie **hatte** mich geschlagen

Ich werde den Brief bis morgen früh geschrieben **haben**

A few compounds of *gehen* and *werden* are exceptions to this rule:

Er ist die Strecke abgegangen	<i>He paced out the distance</i>
Sie ist die Arbeit mit dem Schüler durchgegangen	She went through the work with the pupil
Er ist die Wette eingegangen	He made the bet
Ich bin ihn endlich losgeworden	<i>I have finally got rid of him</i>

(ii) REFLEXIVE VERBS:

Sie hat sich sehr gefreut	Ich hatte mir alles eingebildet
Ich habe mich schon erholt	Sie wird sich müde gelaufen haben
Ich hatte mich aus dem Zimmer gestohlen	

If verbs which form their perfect with *sein* are used with a reflexive pronoun in the dative (= 'each other', see 3.2.3), the perfect is still constructed with *sein*:

Sie sind sich ausgewichen	<i>They avoided each other</i>
Wir sind uns in der Stadt begegnet	<i>We met (each other) in town</i>

(iii) **Intransitive verbs** which **do not express motion or a change of state**. Most of these verbs denote a continuous action or state:

Ich habe gestern lange gearbeitet	Sie hatte dabei gepffiffen
Hast du in der Nacht gut geschlafen?	Sie hatten in Münster studiert
Dort hat jemand auf der Bank gesessen	Sie wird dort lange gewartet haben
Oben hat vorhin das Licht gebrannt	Gerhard wird ihr gesimst haben

The verbs **liegen**, **sitzen** and **stehen** form their perfect tenses with *haben* in standard German in Germany, e.g. *ich **habe** gelegen, gesessen, gestanden*. However, in South Germany, *sein* is commonly used (i.e. *ich **bin** gelegen, gesessen, gestanden*) and this usage is accepted as standard in Austria and Switzerland.

(iv) Most **impersonal verbs**:

Es hat geregnet, geschneit, gehagelt	Es hatte nach Benzin gerochen
An der Tür hat es geklopft	Da hatte es einen Krach gegeben

Impersonal expressions with verbs which form their perfect tenses with *sein* form an exception to this rule, e.g. *Es **ist** mir kalt geworden; Wie **war** es Ihnen in Berlin gegangen?*

(v) The **modal auxiliaries**:

Ich habe es hinnehmen müssen	Wir haben es nicht gekonnt
Sie hat ihn besuchen wollen	Sie hat ihn nie gemocht

The **choice of auxiliary depends on the modal auxiliary**, not on the verb it is used with, and so *haben* is used even if the main verb takes *sein*, e.g. *Ich **hatte** leider schon fahren müssen; Sie **hat** ihm sicher nicht begegnen wollen*.

(a) The use of **haben** and **sein** with the same verb

(i) The **choice of *haben* or *sein* depends on meaning**, i.e. it is not an automatic feature of a particular verb. Verbs which have more than one meaning can be

used with *haben* or *sein* in the perfect if they have one meaning of the kind which requires *haben* for the perfect tense, and another which requires *sein*. This variation between *haben* and *sein* is most common with verbs which can be used transitively or intransitively. Thus, *fahren*, used as an intransitive verb of motion (= 'go'), forms its perfect with *sein*:

Sie **ist** nach Stuttgart gefahren Wir **sind** zu schnell gefahren

But when it is used transitively (= 'drive'), it takes *haben*:

Sie **hat** einen neuen Porsche gefahren Ich **habe** ihn nach Hause gefahren

More examples with other verbs:

Ich **habe** eine Mail bekommen *I have received an e-mail*

Das Essen **ist** mir gut bekommen *The meal agreed with me*

Er **hat** das Rohr gebrochen *He has broken the pipe*

Das Rohr **ist** gebrochen *The pipe has broken*

Sie **hat** auf Zahlung gedrungen *She has pressed for payment*

Wasser **ist** in das Haus gedrungen *Water has penetrated into the house*

Er **hat** ihr gefolgt *He has obeyed her*

Er **ist** ihr gefolgt *He has followed her*

Es **hat** in der Nacht gefroren *There was a frost in the night*

Der See **ist** gefroren *The lake has frozen*

Da **haben** Sie sich geirrt *You have made a mistake*

Er **ist** durch die Straßen geirrt *He roamed through the streets*

Sie **hat** ihn zur Seite gestoßen *She pushed him to one side*

Ich **bin** an den Schrank gestoßen *I bumped into the cupboard*

Du **hast** mir den Spaß verdorben *You have spoilt my fun*

Das Fleisch **ist** verdorben *The meat has gone bad*

Sie **hat** viel Benzin verfahren *She has used a lot of petrol/gas*

Wir **sind** nach diesem Grundsatz verfahren *We acted according to this principle*

Sie **hat** in Künstlerkreisen verkehrt *She moved in artistic circles*

Die Züge **sind** heute nicht verkehrt *The trains didn't run today*

Ich **habe** die Vase zerbrochen *I have broken the vase*

Die Vase **ist** zerbrochen *The vase has broken*

(ii) A few **verbs of motion** form their perfect with *sein* if they express movement from one place to another, but *haben* if they just refer to the activity as such, without any idea of getting somewhere:

Ich **habe** als junger Mann viel getanzt *I danced a lot when I was a young man*

Er **ist** aus dem Zimmer getanzt *He danced out of the room*

Sie **hat** den ganzen Morgen gesegelt *She's been sailing the whole morning*

Sie **ist** über den See gesegelt *She sailed across the lake*

This usage is more frequent in North Germany, and it is limited to a few verbs, i.e. *flattern*, 'flutter', *paddeln* 'paddle', *reiten* 'ride', *rudern* 'row', *schwimmen* 'swim', *segeln* 'sail', *tanzen* 'dance', *treten* 'step'.

10.4 The *werden*-passive and the *sein*-passive

German has two passives. These are easiest to think of as the *WERDEN* -passive and the *SEIN* -passive, according to whether they are formed by combining the auxiliary verb *werden* or *sein* with the past participle:

<i>werden</i> -passive	Die Stadt wird zerstört	Ich wurde verletzt
<i>sein</i> -passive	Die Stadt ist zerstört	Ich war verletzt

The *werden*- passive is often called the *Vorgangspassiv* in German, and the *sein* -passive the *Zustandspassiv*. Their uses are dealt with in [Chapter 13](#). The forms of the *werden*- passive are given in [Table 10.14](#), and those of the *sein* -passive which are in current use are given in [Table 10.15](#).

[Table 10.14](#) The forms of the *werden* -passive

Present			Perfect				Future			
ich	werde	gelobt	ich	bin	gelobt	worden	ich	werde	gelobt	werden
du	wirst	gelobt	du	bist	gelobt	worden	du	wirst	gelobt	werden
es	wird	gelobt	es	ist	gelobt	worden	es	wird	gelobt	werden
wir	werden	gelobt	wir	sind	gelobt	worden	wir	werden	gelobt	werden
ihr	werdet	gelobt	ihr	seid	gelobt	worden	ihr	werdet	gelobt	werden
Sie	werden	gelobt	Sie	sind	gelobt	worden	Sie	werden	gelobt	werden
sie	werden	gelobt	sie	sind	gelobt	worden	sie	werden	gelobt	werden
Past			Pluperfect				Future perfect			
ich	wurde	gelobt	ich	war	gelobt	worden	ich	werde	gelobt	worden sein
du	wurdest	gelobt	du	warst	gelobt	worden	du	wirst	gelobt	worden sein
es	wurde	gelobt	es	war	gelobt	worden	er	wird	gelobt	worden sein
wir	wurden	gelobt	wir	waren	gelobt	worden	wir	werden	gelobt	worden sein
ihr	wurdet	gelobt	ihr	wart	gelobt	worden	ihr	werdet	gelobt	worden sein
Sie	wurden	gelobt	Sie	waren	gelobt	worden	Sie	werden	gelobt	worden sein
sie	wurden	gelobt	sie	waren	gelobt	worden	sie	werden	gelobt	worden sein

[Table 10.15](#) Current forms of the *sein* -passive

Present			Past			Imperative
ich	bin	verletzt	ich	war	verletzt	Sei begrüßt!
du	bist	verletzt	du	warst	verletzt	
es	ist	verletzt	es	war	verletzt	
wir	sind	verletzt	wir	waren	verletzt	Seid begrüßt! Seien Sie begrüßt!
ihr	seid	verletzt	ihr	wart	verletzt	
Sie	sind	verletzt	Sie	waren	verletzt	
sie	sind	verletzt	sie	waren	verletzt	

Further details on the passives:

- In the perfect tenses of the passive the **past participle of *werden*** has **no prefix *ge*** -, i.e. *worden*: *Das Haus ist 1845 gebaut **worden***.
- Imperative forms of the *werden*- passive, e.g. *werde gelobt!* are scarcely ever used. If a passive imperative is needed, the form with *sein* is used.
- Only the present and past tenses of the *sein*- passive, and the imperative, are at all frequently used in practice.
- As in other compound verb forms (see 19.1.2), the participle in passive

constructions is placed at the end of the clause in main clauses:

Das Haus wurde 1845 **gebaut** Das Kind war schwer **verletzt**

- In subordinate clauses the participle comes at the end, before the auxiliary, see 19.1.3:

Ich weiß, dass das Haus vor zwanzig Jahren **gebaut** wurde

10.5 The subjunctive

The SUBJUNCTIVE mood presents what the speaker is saying as **not necessarily true**, whereas the INDICATIVE presents what is said as a **fact**.

Most modern German grammars and textbooks divide the forms of the German subjunctive into two major groups, which they refer to as *KONJUNKTIV I* and *KONJUNKTIV II*. These terms make it simpler to explain their use because the traditional names (i.e. ‘present’ or ‘past’ subjunctive) suggest that their use is connected with time or tense differences, which is not the case. There are no English equivalents for these terms, and the German ones are used in this book. [Table 10.16](#) shows how these groupings are related to the traditional ‘tenses’ of the subjunctive:

[Table 10.16](#) *Konjunktiv I and Konjunktiv II*

<i>Konjunktiv I</i>	‘present’ subjunctive ‘perfect’ subjunctive ‘future’ subjunctive	es gebe es habe gegeben es werde geben
<i>Konjunktiv II</i>	‘past’ subjunctive ‘pluperfect’ subjunctive ‘conditional’	es gäbe es hätte gegeben es würde geben

The subjunctive has compound tenses and passive forms like the indicative, formed in the same way with the auxiliaries *haben*, *sein* and *werden*. In this

section we give information about the various forms of the subjunctive. All the uses of the subjunctive are treated in detail in [Chapter 14](#).

10.5.1 *Konjunktiv I*

[Table 10.17](#) The simple forms of *Konjunktiv I* (the ‘present subjunctive’)

		<i>sein</i>	<i>haben</i>	<i>können</i>	<i>werden</i>	<i>geben</i>	<i>machen</i>
<i>Konjunktiv I</i> (‘present subjunctive’)	ich	sei	habe	könne	werde	gebe	mache
	du	sei(e)st	habest	könnest	werdest	gebest	machest
	es	sei	habe	könne	werde	gebe	mache
	wir	seien	haben	können	werden	geben	machen
	ihr	seiet	habet	könnet	werdet	gebet	machet
	Sie	seien	haben	können	werden	geben	machen
	sie	seien	haben	können	werden	geben	machen

(a) The simple form of *Konjunktiv I* is regular for all verbs except *sein*

For all verbs except *sein* the endings are added to the root of the verb without any other changes or irregularities, as illustrated for a range of typical regular and irregular verbs in [Table 10.17](#). Further information:

- (i) The second person singular and plural forms in - *est* and - *et* (e.g. *du sag est*, *ihr sag et*), are felt to be artificial and are rarely used.
- (ii) For most verbs except *sein*, the only difference in practice between the simple form of *Konjunktiv I* and the present indicative is in the third person singular, which has the ending - *e* as opposed to the ending - *t* of the indicative.
- (iii) There are no vowel changes in the second or third person singular of any strong or irregular verbs. Compare subjunctive: *es gebe*, *es fahre*, with indicative: *es gibt*, *es fährt*.
- (iv) Verbs with a root in - *el* (see 10.2.1c) usually drop the - *e*- of the root before the ending - *e*, e.g. *es segle*, *es lächle*, etc.

(b) Compound forms of *Konjunktiv I*

Compound perfect and future tenses of *Konjunktiv I*, and the *werden*- and *sein*-passive, are constructed in exactly the same way as in the indicative, using the subjunctive forms of the appropriate auxiliary verb, i.e. *haben*, *sein* or *werden*, together with the past participle or the infinitive. [Table 10.18](#) gives examples of all these forms in the third person singular, which is in practice the only form used.

[Table 10.18](#) The compound forms of *Konjunktiv I*

perfect (with <i>haben</i>) perfect (with <i>sein</i>) future werden-passive (present) werden-passive (perfect) werden-passive (future) sein-passive	es habe gekauft es sei gekommen es werde kaufen es werde gekauft es sei gekauft worden es werde gekauft werden es sei gekauft
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10.5.2 *Konjunktiv II*

There are three frequent forms of *Konjunktiv II*:

- The **simple form**, in one word, traditionally called the **past subjunctive**, see [Tables 10.19–20](#), e.g. *ich wäre*, *wir müssten*. Details about its forms are given in (a) below.
- The ‘**pluperfect subjunctive**’, see [Table 10.21](#), formed from the past subjunctive of the auxiliary verb *haben* or *sein* and the past participle, e.g. *ich hätte gewartet*, *Sie wären gekommen*. More details are given in (b) below.
- The ‘**conditional**’, see [Table 10.22](#), formed from the past subjunctive of the auxiliary verb *werden* and the infinitive, e.g. *ich würde meinen*, *wir würden arbeiten*. More details are given in (c) below.

(a) The formation of the simple form of *Konjunktiv II*

[Table 10.19](#) The simple form of *Konjunktiv II* (the ‘past subjunctive’)

	Verb	Past tense	Konjunktiv II
Regular weak verbs	kaufen machen	kaufte machte	kaufte machte
Regular strong verbs	bleiben brechen fahren gehen kommen lassen sprechen tragen tun ziehen	blieb brach fuhr ging kam ließ sprach trug tat zog	blieb e br ä ch e f ü hr e ging e k ä m e ließ e spr ä ch e tr ü g e t ä t e z ö g e
Strong verbs with an irregular past subjunctive	helfen stehen sterben	half stand starb	h ü lf e st ü nd e st ü rb e
Irregular verbs	sein haben werden dürfen können mögen müssen wissen bringen denken	war hatte wurde durfte konnte mochte musste wusste brachte dachte	w ä r e h ä tte w ü rde d ü rfte k ö nnte m ö chte m ü sste w ü sste br ä chte d ä chte

(i) As [Table 10.19](#) illustrates with the form of the first or third person singular, the **simple form of *Konjunktiv II*** is formed from the past tense of the indicative in the following ways:

- For regular **weak verbs** it is **identical to the past indicative**.

- For most **strong verbs**, it is formed by taking the form of the **past tense**, **umlauting the vowel** if possible, and **adding - e** to the endings if possible (although this - e is often dropped in speech).
- A few **strong verbs** have an **irregular *Konjunktiv II*** form with a **different vowel** from that of the past tense. Only a few of these are commonly used nowadays.
- Some other common **irregular verbs** also have ***Umlaut*** in the simple *Konjunktiv II*, including *sein*, *haben*, and most of the modal auxiliaries. All these are given in [Table 10.19](#).

The verb *brauchen* ‘need’ also often has a *Konjunktiv II* form with *Umlaut*, e.g. *ich br ä uchte*. This relatively recent usage is still not universally accepted as standard, but it is now the norm in speech and is increasingly seen in writing.

The simple *Konjunktiv II* forms for each individual **strong** or **irregular verb** are given in [Table 10.23](#).

(ii) The **conjugation** of the simple form of *Konjunktiv II* with endings to indicate person and number in agreement with the subject of the clause is given in [Table 10.20](#), illustrated by examples from a selection of common verbs.

[Table 10.20](#) The conjugation of the simple form of *Konjunktiv II*

		<i>sein</i>	<i>haben</i>	<i>können</i>	<i>werden</i>	<i>geben</i>	<i>machen</i>
Konjunktiv II (‘past subjunctive’)	ich	wäre	hätte	könnte	würde	gäbe	machte
	du	wärest	hättest	könntest	würdest	gäbest	machtest
	es	wäre	hätte	könnte	würde	gäbe	machte
	wir	wären	hätten	könnten	würden	gäben	machten
	ihr	wäret	hättet	könntet	würdet	gäbet	machtet
	Sie	wären	hätten	könnten	würden	gäben	machten
	sie	wären	hätten	könnten	würden	gäben	machten

(b) The ‘pluperfect subjunctive’

Like all perfect tenses in German, the compound perfect of *Konjunktiv II* (the

‘pluperfect subjunctive’) has one of the auxiliaries *haben* or *sein* (depending on the verb, see 10.3.2) with the past participle, as illustrated in [Table 10.21](#).

[Table 10.21](#) The ‘pluperfect subjunctive’

	Pluperfect subjunctive (with haben)		Pluperfect subjunctive (with sein)	
ich	hätte	gekauft	wäre	geblieben
du	hättest	gekauft	wärest	geblieben
es	hätte	gekauft	wäre	geblieben
wir	hätten	gekauft	wären	geblieben
ihr	hättet	gekauft	wäret	geblieben
Sie	hätten	gekauft	wären	geblieben
sie	hätten	gekauft	wären	geblieben

(c) The ‘conditional’

The ‘conditional’ form of *Konjunktiv II* consists of a combination of the **past subjunctive** of the auxiliary verb ***werden*** with the **infinitive**. Its forms are given in [Table 10.22](#).

[Table 10.22](#) The ‘conditional’ form of *Konjunktiv II* with *würde*

	Conditional	
ich	würde	kaufen
du	würdest	kaufen
es	würde	kaufen
wir	würden	kaufen
ihr	würdet	kaufen
Sie	würden	kaufen
sie	würden	kaufen

The compound conditional form with ***würde*** is often used rather than the simple ‘past subjunctive’, so that, for example, *ich würde kommen* is often used rather than *ich käme*. Which form is used **depends on register, meaning and the individual verb involved**. Current usage is explained fully in 14.2.3, but it can be summarized briefly here as follows:

(i) The simple *Konjunktiv II* forms of the weak verbs (which are in any case identical to the past indicative) and those of many less frequent strong verbs are only ever used in formal writing. Indeed, several simple forms of strong verbs (e.g. *ich flöge*, *ich röche*) are felt to be stilted (and even rather ridiculous) and are avoided entirely. These are indicated in [Table 10.23](#).

(ii) On the other hand, with a few of the most common verbs, in particular ***haben***, ***sein***, ***werden*** and the modal auxiliaries, the simple form is much more frequent than the compound form with *würde* in both writing and everyday speech.

(d) Passive forms of *Konjunktiv II*

The *werden*- and *sein* -passive of *Konjunktiv II* are constructed in exactly the same way as in the indicative, using subjunctive forms of the auxiliary verb *werden* or *sein* and the past participle:

<i>werden</i> -passive (past)	es würde gekauft (werden)
<i>werden</i> -passive (pluperfect)	es wäre gekauft worden
<i>sein</i> -passive	es wäre gekauft

10.6 Forms of strong and irregular verbs

[Table 10.23](#) gives the PRINCIPAL PARTS, i.e. the **infinitive**, the **past tense** and the **past participle**, of all strong and irregular verbs, with the exception of the wholly irregular verbs and the modal auxiliaries whose forms are given in [Tables 10.11](#) and [10.12](#).

The following should be noted when consulting [Table 10.23](#):

- The **third person singular** of the **present tense** is given for those verbs which have **vowel changes** in the second and third person singular (see 10.2.1e/f).

- The **simple past subjunctive** form of *Konjunktiv II* (see 10.5.2a) is given for all verbs listed, but it is given **in italics** if it is **obsolete, archaic or rarely used**.
- The **auxiliary** used to form the **perfect tenses** (i.e. *haben* or *sein*, see 10.3.2) is indicated by *hat* or *ist* alongside the past participle.
- **Less common alternative forms** are given in brackets after the commoner ones.
- In principle, **simple verbs** (i.e. without prefixes) **are given** if they exist, even if they are less frequent than compound verbs (e.g. *schwinden*, which is used less often than *verschwinden*). Compound verbs normally conjugate in the same way as the simple verb from which they are derived, but exceptions to this rule are given in the table.

[Table 10.23](#) Principal parts of strong and irregular verbs

Infinitive 3rd person singular present	Past tense <i>Konjunktiv II</i>	Past participle
backen <i>bake</i> es bäckt (backt)	backte (buk) <i>büke</i>	hat gebacken
befehlen <i>command</i> es befiehlt [<i>fehlen</i> 'lack' is weak, i.e. <i>fehlte, gefehlt</i>]	befahl <i>beföhle</i> (<i>befähle</i>)	hat befohlen
beginnen <i>begin</i>	begann begänne(begönne)	hat begonnen
beißen <i>bite</i>	biss <i>bisse</i>	hat gebissen
bergen <i>rescue; hide</i> es birgt	barg <i>bärke</i>	hat geborgen
bersten <i>crack, burst</i> es birst (berstet)	barst <i>bärste</i>	hat geborsten
bewegen <i>induce</i> [<i>bewegen</i> 'move' is weak, i.e. <i>bewegte, bewegt</i>]	bewog <i>bewöge</i>	hat bewogen
biegen <i>bend; turn</i>	bog <i>böge</i>	hat gebogen
bieten <i>offer</i>	bot <i>böte</i>	hat geboten
binden <i>bind</i>	band <i>bände</i>	hat gebunden
bitten <i>ask, request</i>	bat <i>bäte</i>	hat gebeten

blasen <i>blow</i> es bläst	blies <i>bliese</i>	hat geblasen
bleiben <i>stay, remain</i>	blieb <i>bliebe</i>	ist geblieben
braten <i>fry, roast</i> es brät (bratet)	briet <i>briete</i>	hat gebraten
brechen <i>break</i> es bricht	brach <i>bräche</i>	hat/ist gebrochen
brennen <i>burn</i>	brannte <i>brennte</i>	hat gebrannt
bringen <i>bring</i>	brachte <i>brächte</i>	hat gebracht
denken <i>think</i>	dachte <i>dächte</i>	hat gedacht
dingen <i>hire, engage (e.g. servant)</i>	<i>dingte(dang)</i> <i>dingte/dänge</i>	hat gedungen
[<i>dingen</i> is archaic, but <i>sich ausbedingen</i> ‘make a condition’ is still used in formal registers]		
dreschen <i>thresh</i> es drischt	drosch <i>drösche</i>	hat gedroschen
dringen <i>penetrate</i>	drang <i>dränge</i>	hat/ist gedrungen
empfehlen <i>recommend</i> es empfiehlt	empfahl <i>empfähle</i> <i>(empfähle)</i>	hat empfohlen
erkiesen <i>choose</i>	erkor <i>erköre</i>	hat erkoren
[Only the past tense and the past participle are now used, in elevated registers]		
erlöschen <i>go out (lights)</i> es erlischt	erlosch <i>erlösche</i>	ist erloschen
[Simple <i>löschen</i> ‘extinguish’, ‘put out’ is weak, i.e. <i>löschte, gelöscht</i>]		
erschallen <i>ring out</i>	erscholl/erschallte <i>erschallte</i>	ist erschollen/erschallt
erschrecken <i>be startled</i> es erschrickt	erschrak <i>erschräke</i>	ist erschrocken
[Transitive <i>erschrecken</i> ‘frighten’ is weak, i.e. <i>erschreckte, erschreckt</i>]		
essen <i>eat</i> es isst	aß <i>aße</i>	hat gegessen
fahren <i>go, drive</i> es fährt	fuhr <i>führe</i>	ist/hat gefahren
fallen <i>fall</i> es fällt	fiel <i>fielen</i>	ist gefallen
fangen <i>catch</i> es fängt	fang <i>fänge</i>	hat gefangen
fechten <i>fight, fence</i> es ficht	focht <i>(fechtete)</i> <i>föchte</i>	hat gefochten
finden <i>find</i>	fand <i>fände</i>	hat gefunden

flechten <i>plait, braid</i> eslicht	flocht (flechtete) <i>flochte</i>	hat geflochten
fliegen <i>fly</i>	flog <i>floge</i>	ist/hat geflogen
fliehen <i>flee</i>	floh <i>flohe</i>	ist geflohen
flieBen <i>flow</i>	floss <i>flosse</i>	ist geflossen
fragen <i>ask</i> erfragt(lit., reg. frägt)	fragte (<i>arch., lit.</i> <i>frug</i>) <i>fragte</i>	hat gefragt
fressen <i>eat (of animals)</i> esfrisst	fraß <i>fräße</i>	hat gefressen
frieren <i>freeze</i>	fror <i>fröre</i>	hat/ist gefroren
gären <i>ferment</i>	gor/gärte <i>göre/gärte</i>	hat/ist gegoren/ gegärt
[The weak forms are usual when <i>gären</i> is used figuratively]		
gebären <i>give birth</i> es gebiert (gebärt)	gebar <i>gebäre</i>	hat geboren
geben <i>give</i> esgibt	gab <i>gäbe</i>	hat gegeben
gedeihen <i>thrive</i>	gedieh <i>gediehe</i>	ist gediehen
gehen <i>go</i>	ging <i>ginge</i>	ist gegangen
gelingen <i>succeed</i>	gelang <i>gelänge</i>	ist gelungen
gelten <i>be valid</i> esgilt	galt <i>gälte (gölte)</i>	hat gegolten
genesen <i>recover</i> (el ev.)	genas <i>genäse</i>	ist genesen
genießen <i>enjoy</i>	genoss <i>genösse</i>	hat genossen
geschehen <i>happen</i> es geschieht	geschah <i>geschähe</i>	ist geschehen
gewinnen <i>win</i>	gewann <i>gewänne/gewönne</i>	hat gewonnen
gießen <i>pour</i>	goss <i>gösse</i>	hat gegossen
gleichen <i>resemble</i>	glich <i>gliche</i>	hat geglichen
gleiten <i>glide, slide</i>	glitt <i>glitte</i>	ist geglitten
[<i>begleiten</i> ‘accompany’ is weak, i.e. <i>begleitete, begleitet</i>]		
glimmen <i>glimmer</i> (elev.)	glomm/glimmte <i>glömme/glimmte</i>	hat geglommen/ geglimmt
graben <i>dig</i> esgräbt	grub <i>grübe</i>	hat gegraben

greifen <i>grasp</i>	griff griffe	hat gegriffen
halten <i>hold; stop</i> es hält	hielt hielte	hat gehalten
[The compound verbs <i>beinhalten</i> ‘comprise’ and <i>haushalten</i> ‘be economical’ are weak]		
hängen <i>hang</i> (<i>intrans.</i>)	hing hinge	hat gehangen
[The transitive verb <i>hängen</i> ‘hang’ is weak, i.e. <i>hängte</i> , <i>gehängt</i>]		
hauen <i>hew, cut</i>	haute (hieb) <i>haute</i> (<i>hiebe</i>)	hat gehauen (<i>coll.</i> <i>gehaut</i>)
[The strong form <i>hieb</i> is literary and used in the meaning ‘hew, cut (with a sword)’]		
heben <i>lift</i>	hob (hub) <i>höbe</i> (<i>hübe</i>)	hat gehoben
[<i>hub</i> and <i>hübe</i> are occasional in literary registers, especially with <i>anheben</i> ‘commence’]		
heißen <i>be called</i>	hieß hieße	hat geheißen
helfen <i>help</i> <i>eshilft</i>	half <i>hülfe</i> (<i>hälfe</i>)	hat geholfen
kennen <i>know</i>	kannte <i>kennte</i>	hat gekannt
klimmen <i>climb</i>	klohm (<i>klimmte</i>) <i>klömme</i>	hat geklommen (<i>geklimmt</i>)
klingen <i>sound</i>	klang <i>klänge</i>	hat geklungen
kneifen <i>pinch</i>	kniff <i>kniffe</i>	hat gekniffen
kommen <i>come</i>	kam <i>käme</i>	ist gekommen
kriechen <i>creep, crawl</i>	kroch <i>kröche</i>	ist gekrochen
küren <i>choose</i>	kürte (<i>elev. kor</i>) <i>kürte/köre</i>	hat gekürt (<i>elev.</i> <i>gekoren</i>)
laden <i>load; invite</i> es lädt (<i>ladet</i>)	lud <i>lüde</i>	hat geladen
[<i>ladet</i> is regional, and only used in the sense ‘invite’, or with the compound <i>einladen</i>]		
lassen <i>leave; let</i> es lässt	NeB <i>ließe</i>	hat gelassen
[<i>veranlassen</i> ‘cause’ is weak, i.e. <i>veranlasste</i> , <i>veranlasst</i>]		

laufen <i>run</i> es läuft	lief <i>liefe</i>	ist/hat gelaufen
leiden <i>suffer</i>	litt <i>litte</i>	hat gelitten
[<i>verleiden</i> 'spoil' is weak, i.e. <i>verleidete, verleidet</i>]		
leihen <i>lend; borrow</i>	lieh <i>liehe</i>	hat geliehen
lesen <i>read</i> es liest	las <i>läse</i>	hat gelesen
liegen <i>lie</i>	lag <i>läge</i>	hat gelegen
lügen <i>tell lies</i>	log <i>löge</i>	hat gelogen
mahlen <i>grind</i>	mahlte <i>mahlte</i>	hat gemahlen
meiden <i>avoid</i>	mied <i>miede</i>	hat gemieden
melken <i>milk</i> es melkt (milkt)	melkte (molk) melkte	hat gemolken (gemelkt)
messen <i>measure</i> es misst	maß <i>mäße</i>	hat gemessen
misslingen <i>fail</i>	misslang <i>misslänge</i>	ist misslungen
nehmen <i>take</i> es nimmt	nahm <i>nähme</i>	hat genommen
nennen <i>name, call</i>	nannte <i>nennte</i>	hat genannt
pfeifen <i>whistle</i>	pfiff <i>pfiffe</i>	hat gepfiffen
preisen <i>praise</i>	pries <i>priese</i>	hat gepriesen
[The compound <i>lobpreisen</i> can be weak (e.g. <i>lobpreiste</i>) or strong (e.g. <i>lobpries</i>)]		
quellen <i>gush, well up</i> es quillt	quoll <i>quölle</i>	ist gequollen
raten <i>advise</i> es rät	riet <i>riete</i>	hat geraten
reiben <i>rub</i>	rieb <i>riebe</i>	hat gerieben
reißen <i>tear</i>	riss <i>risse</i>	hat/ist gerissen
reiten <i>ride (a horse)</i>	ritt <i>ritte</i>	hat/ist geritten
rennen <i>run</i>	rannte <i>rennte</i>	hat/ist gerannt
riechen <i>smell</i>	roch <i>röche</i>	hat gerochen
ringen <i>wrestle</i>	rang <i>ränge</i>	hat gerungen
rinnen <i>flow, trickle</i>	rann <i>ränne (rönne)</i>	ist geronnen
rufen <i>call, cry</i>	rief <i>riefe</i>	hat gerufen
		hat gesalzen

salzen <i>salt</i>	salzte <i>salzte</i>	(<i>gesalzt</i>)
saufen <i>drink (of animals); booze es</i> <i>säuft</i>	soff <i>söffe</i>	hat gesoffen
saugen <i>suck</i>	saugte/sog <i>saugte/söge</i>	hat gesaugt/ gesogen
[Only weak forms are used in technical language, and with <i>staubsaugen</i> ‘vacuum-clean’]		
schaffen <i>create</i>	schuf <i>schüfe</i>	hat geschaffen
[<i>schaffen</i> is weak (<i>schaffte, geschafft</i>) in the meaning ‘manage’, ‘work’]		
schalten <i>switch</i>	schaltete <i>schaltete</i>	hat geschaltet
[In Austria the strong participles <i>angeschalten</i> and <i>eingeschalten</i> are often used]		
scheiden <i>separate; depart</i>	schied <i>schiede</i>	hat/ist geschieden
scheinen <i>seem; shine</i>	schien <i>schiene</i>	hat geschienen
scheißen <i>shit(vulg.)</i>	schiss <i>schisse</i>	hat geschissen
schelten <i>scold</i> <i>esschilt</i>	schalt <i>schölte</i>	hat gescholten
scheren <i>shear, clip</i>	schor <i>schöre</i>	hat geschoren
[<i>scheren</i> is weak in the meaning ‘concern’, and in <i>sich scheren</i> ‘bother about’, ‘clear off’]		
schieben <i>push, shove</i>	schob <i>schöbe</i>	hat geschoben
schießen <i>shoot</i>	schoss <i>schösse</i>	hat/ist geschossen
schinden <i>flay, ill-treat</i>	[<i>schindete/schund</i>]	hat geschunden
[There is uncertainty about the past tense forms <i>schindete</i> and <i>schund</i> , although both are found]		
schlafen <i>sleep</i> <i>es schläft</i>	schlief <i>schliefe</i>	hat geschlafen
schlagen <i>hit, beat</i> <i>es schlägt</i>	schlug <i>schlüge</i>	hat geschlagen
schleichen <i>creep</i>	schlich <i>schliche</i>	ist geschlichen
schleifen <i>grind, sharpen</i>	schliff <i>schliffe</i>	hat geschliffen
[<i>schleifen</i> is weak (i.e. <i>schleifte, geschleift</i>) in the meaning ‘drag’]		

schließen <i>shut</i>	schloss schlösse	hat geschlossen
schlingen <i>wind, wrap</i>	schlang <i>schlänge</i>	hat geschlungen
schmeißen <i>throw, chuck(coll.)</i>	schmiss schmisse	hat geschmissen
schmelzen <i>melt</i> <i>essmilzt(schmelzt)</i>	schmolz (schmelzte) schmolze	hat/ist geschmolzen (geschmelzt)
[The weak forms are colloquial and only used if <i>schmelzen</i> is used transitively]		
schneiden <i>cut</i>	schnitt schnitte	hat geschnitten
schreiben <i>write</i>	schrieb schriebe	hat geschrieben
schreien <i>shout, scream</i>	schrie <i>schrie</i>	hat geschrie(e)n
schreiten <i>stride</i>	schrift schritte	ist geschritten
schweigen <i>not speak</i>	schwie schwiege	hat geschwiegen
schwellen <i>swell</i> <i>esschwilt</i>	schwoll <i>schwölle</i>	ist geschwollen
[<i>schwellen</i> is weak (i.e. <i>schwellte, geschwellt</i>) when used transitively]		
schwimmen <i>swim</i>	schwamm <i>schwömme</i> (<i>schwämme</i>)	ist/hat geschwommen
schwinden <i>disappear</i>	schwand schwände	ist geschwunden
schwingen <i>swing</i>	schwang <i>schwänge</i>	hat geschwungen
schwören <i>swear</i>	schwor (lit. schwur) <i>schwüre (schwöre)</i>	hat geschworen
sehen <i>see</i> <i>essieht</i>	sah sähe	hat gesehen
senden <i>send</i>	sendete/sandte sendete	hat gesendet/ gesandt
[The weak forms <i>sendete, gesendet</i> are mainly used in technical senses (i.e. = 'broadcast')]		
sieden <i>boil(elev.; S.G.)</i>	siedete/sott <i>siedete</i> (<i>sötte</i>)	hat gesotten (<i>gesiedet</i>)
singen <i>sing</i>	sang sänge	hat gesungen
sinken <i>sink</i>	sank <i>sänke</i>	ist gesunken
sinnen <i>meditate(elev.)</i>	sann <i>sänne (sönne)</i>	hat gesonnen

sitzen <i>sit</i>	saß <i>säße</i>	hat gesessen
spalten <i>split, cleave</i>	spaltete <i>spaltete</i>	hat/ist gespaltet (gespalten)
<i>[gespalten is used mainly as an adjective, e.g. dasgespaltene Deutschland]</i>		
speien <i>spit, spew(elev.)</i>	spie <i>spiee</i>	hat gespie(e)n
spinnen <i>spin; be stupid</i>	spann <i>spönne</i> (spänne)	hat gesponnen
sprechen <i>speak</i> es spricht	sprach <i>sprache</i>	hat gesprochen
sprießen <i>sprout (elev.)</i>	spross <i>sprösse</i>	ist gesprossen
springen <i>jump</i>	sprang <i>spränge</i>	ist gesprungen
stechen <i>prick, sting</i> es sticht	stach <i>stäche</i>	hat gestochen
stehen <i>stand</i>	stand <i>stünde</i> (stände)	hat gestanden
stehlen <i>steal</i> es stiehlt	stahl <i>stähle (stöhle)</i>	hat gestohlen
steigen <i>climb; rise</i>	stieg <i>stiege</i>	ist gestiegen
sterben <i>die</i> es stirbt	starb <i>stürbe</i>	ist gestorben
stieben <i>fly up (like dust) (elev.)</i>	stob (stiebte) <i>stöbe</i>	ist gestoben (gestiebt)
stinken <i>stink</i>	stank <i>stänke</i>	hat gestunken
stoßen <i>bump; push</i> es stößt	stieß <i>stieße</i>	ist/hat gestoßen
streichen <i>stroke</i>	strich <i>striche</i>	ist/hat gestrichen
streiten <i>quarrel</i>	stritt <i>stritte</i>	hat gestritten
tragen <i>carry, wear</i> es trägt	trug <i>trüge</i>	hat getragen
<i>[beantragen 'apply' and beauftragen 'commission' are weak]</i>		
treffen <i>meet; hit</i> es trifft	traf <i>träfe</i>	hat getroffen
treiben <i>drive, drift</i>	trieb <i>triebe</i>	ist/hat getrieben
treten <i>step</i> es tritt	trat <i>träte</i>	ist/hat getreten
triefen <i>drip(elev.)</i>	triefte/troff <i>tröffe</i>	hat getriefft (getroffen)
trinken <i>drink</i>	trank <i>tränke</i>	hat getrunken

trügen *deceive*

trog *tröge*

hat **getrogen**

tun *do*

tat *täte*

hat **getan**

verbleichen *fade*

verblich *verbliche*

istverblichen

[Simple *bleichen* 'bleach' is weak (i.e. *bleichte, gebleicht*), as is *erbleichen* 'turn pale']

verderben *spoil* es **verdirbt**

verdarb *verdürbe*

hat/**istverdorben**

verdrießen *vex(elev.)*

verdross *verdrösse*

hatverdrossen

vergessen *forget* es **vergisst**

vergaß *vergäße*

hat **vergessen**

verlieren *lose*

verlor *verlöre*

hat **verloren**

verschleiß *wear out*

verschliss

ist/hat

verschlis

verschlissen

verzeihen *excuse*

verzieh *verziehe*

hatverziehen

wachsen *grow* es **wächst**

wuchs *wüchse*

ist **gewachsen**

wägen *weigh (one's words)*

wog/wägte *wöge*

hat **gewogen/
gewägt**

[Simple *wägen* is archaic; *erwägen* 'consider' only has strong forms: *erwog, erwogen*]

waschen *wash* es **wäscht**

wusch *wüsche*

hat **gewaschen**

weben *weave*

webte (wob) *webte*

hat **gewebt**
(gewoben)

[The strong forms are only used in literary German in figurative senses]

weichen *yield, give way*

wich *wiche*

ist **gewichen**

[In the meaning 'soften' *weichen* is weak, as are *einweichen* 'soak' and *aufweichen* 'make soft']

weisen *point*

wies *wiese*

hat **gewiesen**

wenden *turn*

wandte/wendete
wendete

hat **gewandt/
gewendet**

[Irregular *wandte, gewandte* more frequent, except in the sense 'turn over', 'turn round' (e.g. *das Auto, das Heu wenden*). The compounds *entwenden* and *verwenden* are more often regular]

werben *recruit; advertise* es **wirbt**

warb *würbe*

hat **geworben**

werfen <i>throw</i> eswirft	warf <i>würfe</i>	hat geworfen
wiegen <i>weigh</i>	wog <i>wöge</i>	hat gewogen
<i>[wiegen is weak (wiegte, gewiegt) in the meaning 'rock' (cradle, etc.)]</i>		
winden <i>wind, twist</i> (elev.)	wand <i>wände</i>	hat gewunden
winken <i>wave</i>	winkte <i>winkte</i>	hat gewinkt (<i>coll.</i> gewunken)
wringen <i>wring (clothes) (N.G.)</i>	wrang <i>wränge</i>	hat gewrungen
ziehen <i>pull; move</i>	zog <i>zöge</i>	hat/ist gezogen
zwingen <i>force</i>	zwang <i>zwänge</i>	hat gezwungen

The infinitive and the participles

This chapter deals with the uses of the NON-FINITE forms of the verb, i.e. the INFINITIVE and the PRESENT and PAST PARTICIPLES, as shown in [Table 11.1](#).

[Table 11.1](#) Non-finite forms of the verb

Infinitive	Present participle	Past participle
kauf en	kauf end	ge kauft
sing en	sing end	ge sung en
wander n	wander nd	ge wander t
aufmach en	aufmach end	auf ge mach t
bestell en	bestell end	bestell t

As explained in 10.1.1e, these forms of the verb do not have endings to show agreement with the subject, or to express other categories of the verb such as tense and mood. They are used to form the compound tenses and the passive (see 10.3 and 10.4), and they occur in a number of constructions which depend on an element in a full clause with a finite verb. The various non-finite forms and their uses are treated in the following sections of this chapter:

- The **forms** of the **infinitive** (section 11.1)
- The uses of the **infinitive with zu** (section 11.2)
- The uses of the **infinitive without zu** – the ‘bare infinitive’ (section 11.3)
- Infinitives used as **nouns** (section 11.4)
- The uses of the **present** and **past participles** (section 11.5)
- Equivalents of the English ‘ing’-form in German (section 11.6)

11.1 Forms of the infinitive

11.1.1 The simple and compound infinitive

(a) The simple infinitive is the basic form under which verbs are listed in dictionaries

(see 10.1.1). For most verbs it ends in - *en* (e.g. *komm en*, *mach en*, *seh en*), but a few verbs have an infinitive ending in - *n*, i.e. *sein*, *tun* and verbs with a stem ending in - *el* and - *er* (see 10.2.1c)

(b) Compound infinitives

The infinitive of the auxiliaries *haben*, *sein* and *werden* can be combined with the past participle of a verb to form compound infinitives:

perfect infinitive (with <i>haben</i>)	gesehen haben
perfect infinitive (with <i>sein</i>)	angekommen sein
werden-passive infinitive	verletzt werden
sein-passive infinitive	verletzt sein
perfect passive infinitive	verletzt worden sein

The perfect infinitive is formed with *haben* or *sein* in accordance with the rules given in 10.3.2. For the use of *sein* or *werden* in the passive, see 13.2.2. The German perfect infinitive is used to show that an action took place before the time of speaking, not unlike in English:

Sie muss das Buch lesen	<i>She must read the book</i>
Sie muss das Buch gelesen haben	<i>She must have read the book</i>

11.1.2 The infinitive with and without *zu*

In some constructions in German, the **infinitive** is accompanied by the **particle zu**, whilst in others a so-called **bare infinitive** is used, without *zu*:

Ich riet ihr zum Arzt **zu gehen**
Ich konnte nicht zum Arzt **gehen**

I advised her to go to the doctor
I couldn't go to the doctor

Constructions with *zu* (which are more frequent) are explained in section 11.2. Constructions with the bare infinitive are treated in section 11.3.

(a) *zu* with simple verbs and verbs with inseparable prefixes

zu comes immediately before the verb and is separated from it in writing:

Sie fing an **zu schreiben**
Ich war bereit **zu verhandeln**

Wir kamen auf dieses Thema **zu sprechen**
Es gefiel mir mich mit ihr **zu unterhalten**

(b) *zu* with verbs with a separable prefix

zu is placed **between the prefix and the verb**. The whole is written as a single word (see 10.2.1i):

Sie hatte vor ihn **anzurufen**
Es wäre wohl besser ihr davon
abzuraten

Es war schön euch **wiederzusehen**
Sie wusste mit diesem Mann
umzugehen

If a verb has a separable prefix followed by an inseparable one, as in *anvertrauen*, *zu* comes between the prefixes:

Es fällt mir nicht ein mich ihm **anzuvertrauen** *I wouldn't dream of confiding in him*

Although the verb *missverstehen* is inseparable, the *zu* is placed **after** the prefix, i.e. *misszuverstehen*. A few other verbs with the prefix *miss-* also allow this as an alternative, e.g. *zu missachten* or (less commonly) *misszuachten*, see 20.7.3.

(c) *zu* with compound infinitives

zu is placed between the participle and the auxiliary *haben*, *sein* or *werden*:

Er verleugnet es sie betrogen zu haben	<i>He denies having deceived her</i>
Ihr gefällt es nicht betrogen zu werden	<i>She doesn't like being deceived</i>
Sie behauptete betrogen worden zu sein	<i>She claimed to have been deceived</i>

zu is also placed between the main verb and a modal auxiliary:

Es freut mich Sie hier begrüßen zu dürfen	<i>It is a pleasure to be able to welcome you here</i>
---	--

11.2 The infinitive with *zu*

Infinitives with *zu* are typically used in reduced clauses, called the *Infinitivsatz* in German. These clauses can depend on a noun, a verb or an adjective in a full clause within the same sentence. The infinitive with *zu* comes at the end of its clause, i.e. in the same position as the finite verb in a subordinate clause (see 19.1.1c):

Er fing an heftig zu weinen	<i>He began to cry bitterly</i>
Er gab mir die Erlaubnis in Berlin zu bleiben	<i>He gave me permission to stay in Berlin</i>
Es ist nicht schwer eine fremde Sprache zu lernen	<i>It is not difficult to learn a foreign language</i>

If there is more than one infinitive, *zu* is repeated with each, e.g. *Es begann **zu** blitzen und **zu** donnern und **zu** stürmen.*

For the use of the comma with infinitive clauses, see 21.5.3.

11.2.1 The position of infinitive clauses with *zu*

(a) The infinitive clause is usually quite separate from the main clause

i.e. it is not enclosed inside the clause it depends on (see 19.8.1), and it follows the verb at the end of that clause:

Sie hatten beschlossen **vor dem Rathaus zu warten**

(*not* *Sie hatten vor dem Rathaus zu warten beschlossen)

Wir hatten vor **im Urlaub nach Rom zu fliegen**

(*not* *Wir hatten im Urlaub nach Rom zu fliegen vor)

... weil er sich bemüht hat **rechtzeitig fertig zu sein**

(*not* *... weil er sich rechtzeitig fertig zu sein bemüht hat)

There are a few **exceptions** to this general rule, when the infinitive clause can (or must) be enclosed within the clause which it depends on. These are:

(i) with the **semi-auxiliary verbs** (see 11.2.4):

... bevor sein Duft ihn **zu ersticken drohte** (*Süßkind*)

Seine Brutalität ist nicht mehr **zu ertragen gewesen** (*Wickert*)

(ii) Enclosure is possible with **some other common verbs**, although it is never obligatory. It is more typical of formal, especially written registers:

Dass sie ihn **entdeckt zu haben** glaubte, war ein Beweis dafür, dass ... (*Süßkind*)

(*or*: Dass sie glaubte ihn entdeckt zu haben, ...)

Du hast mir **das zu tun** versprochen

(*or*: Du hast mir versprochen das zu tun)

Verbs often used with this construction are *anfangen*, *beginnen*, *glauben*, *hoffen*, *meinen*, *trachten*, *vermögen*, *versuchen*, *wagen*, *wünschen*. Other verbs are sometimes used in this way in very formal registers, but constructions like this can sound stilted.

With these verbs, too, the infinitive clause can be incorporated in the main clause by splicing the object of the infinitive into it, if there is only the finite verb and its subject in the main clause:

Er wagte die Reise aus diesem Grunde nicht abzubrechen	<i>He didn't dare to break his journey for that reason</i>
Diesen Vorgang wollen wir zu erklären versuchen	<i>We want to try to explain this series of events</i>

This construction is also typical of formal registers.

(b) Infinitive clauses depending on relative clauses

The German equivalent of English constructions such as ‘a man whom I tried to kill’ typically has the infinitive clause enclosed within the relative clause, e.g. *ein Mann, den ich zu töten* versuchte. Other examples:

... die Person, deren Gesicht ich zu erraten versucht hatte (<i>Frisch</i>)	<i>... the person whose face I had tried to recognize</i>
... kein Mann, den zu beseitigen eine Revolution gelohnt hätte (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>... not a man whom it would have been worth a revolution to get rid of</i>

Alternatively, if there is only a simple infinitive clause (i.e. one consisting only of *zu* plus the infinitive), it can follow the finite verb, e.g. *ein Mann, den er versuchte zu töten*.

11.2.2 Infinitive clauses as the subject or object of a verb

(a) Infinitive clauses are often used in German as the subject of a verb

These usually correspond in English to an infinitive clause or to a clause with an

‘ing’-form. In many contexts there is a choice in English between using the ‘ing’-form or the infinitive with ‘to’, but in German only an infinitive clause is possible, as German does not use present participles in the way the ‘ing’-form is used in English (see 11.6). The finite verb has the ending of the third person singular:

Ihn zu überzeugen wird nicht leicht sein	<i>To convince him/Convincing him won't be easy</i>
So etwas zu erlauben ist unerhört	<i>To allow/allowing that kind of thing is outrageous</i>
Ihr Ziel ist einen Roman zu schreiben	<i>Her aim is to write/writing a novel</i>

(b) If a subject infinitive clause is short, it can, optionally, be used without *zu*

This is most frequent with the verb *sein* and in set phrases:

Lange Auto (zu) fahren ist sehr anstrengend	<i>Driving a car for long periods is very strenuous</i>
Irren ist menschlich	<i>To err is human</i>

(c) A subject infinitive clause is sometimes anticipated by *es* in the preceding main clause

(see 3.6.2e for further details of when this *es* is used):

Es war mir nicht möglich ihm früher zu mailen	<i>It wasn't possible for me to e-mail him earlier</i>
Ihm steht (es) nicht zu ein Urteil zu fällen	<i>It's not up to him to pass judgement</i>

(d) The infinitive clause with *zu* is often used as the object of a verb

Like subject infinitive clauses, these can correspond to an English infinitive clause or a clause with an 'ing'-form:

Ich hoffe dich bald wiedersehen zu können	<i>I hope to be able to see you again soon</i>
Ich gebe zu das gesagt zu haben	<i>I admit having said that</i>
Ich habe vor sie morgen zu besuchen	<i>I intend to visit them/visiting them tomorrow</i>

(e) A following object infinitive clause is sometimes anticipated by *es*

(see 3.6.2f for details of when this *es* is used)

Ich konnte es kaum ertragen ihn so leiden zu sehen	<i>I could hardly bear to see him suffer like that</i>
Sie hat (es) versäumt die Miete zu zahlen	<i>She missed paying the rent</i>

(f) Infinitive clauses depending on verbs which govern a prepositional object

Infinitive clauses can be linked to a prepositional object in the preceding clause, and these are often anticipated by a prepositional adverb (i.e. *da(r)* + preposition). See 16.5.14 for further details on this construction:

Bitte achten Sie beim Verlassen des Zuges darauf , Ihre persönlichen Gegenstände mitzunehmen (<i>train announcement</i>)	<i>When leaving the train please be sure to take your personal possessions with you</i>
Ich erinnere mich (daran) , sie voriges Jahr in Bremen gesehen zu haben	<i>I remember having seen her in Bremen last year</i>

11.2.3 The subject of the verb in infinitive clauses

(a) Infinitives in infinitive clauses all have a subject

As infinitives are non-finite forms of the verb, they do not have endings in agreement with a subject, but when they are used in a clause they do have a subject, which is the person or thing mentioned in the preceding clause that is carrying out the action expressed by the infinitive.

When an infinitive clause is used as the **object of a verb**, there are some contexts where the **subject of the main verb** is the **subject of the infinitive**. Thus, in the following sentence, it is Christian, the **subject of *versprechen***, who has to be understood as the **subject of *mitzunehmen***:

Christian versprach Ellen sie
mitzunehmen

*Christian promised Ellen to take her with
him*

There are other contexts, though, where the **object of the main verb** is the **subject of the infinitive**. In the following example, it is Ellen, the **object of *bitten***, who is understood as the **subject of *mitzunehmen***:

Christian bat Ellen ihn mitzunehmen

Christian asked Ellen to take him with her

What is understood to be the subject of the infinitive typically depends on the sense of the verbs involved and the context. In practice English and German generally agree on whether the subject or object of the main verb is to be understood as the subject of the infinitive. More examples:

Anna gab zu **sich** geirrt zu
haben

*Anna admitted having made a mistake (Anna – the
subject of *zugeben* – was mistaken)*

Sabine hat **Manfred** geraten
die Ausstellung zu besuchen

*Sabine advised Manfred to see the exhibition
(Manfred – the object of *raten* – should see the
exhibition)*

However, there are a few contexts where there are differences between German and English, as explained in the remainder of this section.

(b) German verbs whose object cannot act as the subject of a following infinitive clause

In practice, there are far fewer verbs in German which allow an object to be taken as the subject of a following infinitive. In particular, it is **not possible with most verbs of wishing, desiring, saying, knowing, thinking** and the like. With these a **dass** - or **wenn** -clause has to be used in German:

Sie will, dass ich mit ihr gehe	<i>She wants me to go with her</i>
Ich möchte nicht, dass es irgendein Missverständnis gibt	I don't want there to be any misunderstanding
Ich erwarte, dass sie bald nach Flensburg umzieht	I expect her to move to Flensburg soon
Sage ihm doch, dass er warten soll	Tell him to wait, though
Ich wusste, dass es ein Irrtum war	I knew it to be a mistake
Mir wäre es lieber, wenn Sie hier nicht rauchen würden	<i>I would prefer you not to smoke here</i>

These verbs cannot be used in the passive with a following infinitive clause, either, and a subordinate clause has to be used in German where English has this type of construction:

Man erwartet, dass sie bald nach Flensburg umzieht	<i>She is expected to move to Flensburg soon</i>
Man sagte uns/Uns wurde gesagt, dass wir warten sollten	<i>We were told to wait</i>

(c) With some verbs the subject of the infinitive is not specified

It has to be understood as **man**, i.e. 'person or persons unknown' who are to carry out the action expressed by the infinitive. This construction is chiefly used with verbs of ordering or requesting and the like. In equivalent contexts English typically uses a clause with a passive, a passive infinitive or a noun construction:

Der Präsident hat angewiesen alle	<i>The president instructed that all the</i>
--	--

Universitäten zu schließen
Er ordnete an **die Gefangenen zu entlassen**
Helmut befahl früh **aufzubrechen**

universities be closed
He ordered the prisoners to be released
Helmut ordered an early start

Other typical verbs used in constructions of this kind are: *anregen, auffordern, beantragen, befehlen, befürworten, bitten, drängen, eintreten, empfehlen, ersuchen, fordern, raten, veranlassen, verlangen, warnen.*

(d) Cases of uncertainty

With some verbs **the subject or the object of the main verb** can act as the subject of the infinitive, and the listener or reader has to resolve the ambiguity from the context. In English a subordinate clause is normally used with verbs of this kind, and there is no ambiguity:

Er schlug mir vor **das Zimmer aufzuräumen**

He suggested to me that I/he/we should tidy the room up

Other verbs which are used like this are *anbieten, einreden, zusichern.*

(e) An infinitive clause is used in German after some verbs denoting mental processes

The English equivalents typically have a subordinate clause:

Er behauptete (glaubte, meinte, war überzeugt) **mich gesehen zu haben**

He maintained (believed, thought, was convinced) that he had seen me

This construction is more usual in writing than in speech, where a subordinate clause (typically with the conjunction *dass* omitted, see 17.2.1b) is often preferred, e.g. *Er meinte, er hätte mich gesehen/dass er mich gesehen hätte.*

11.2.4 Infinitive clauses with ‘semi-auxiliary’ verbs

Some verbs have a closer link with a following infinitive clause than others. Their main role is to modify the meaning of the verb used in the infinitive in some way, rather like a modal auxiliary verb (see [Chapter 15](#)), and it is useful to think of them as ‘semi-auxiliary’ verbs.

English has more ‘semi-auxiliary’ verbs of this kind than German. The natural German equivalent to many of these is a construction with an adverb, e.g. *Ich spiele **gern** Tennis* ‘I **like** to play tennis’, *Ich sah sie **zufällig** in der Stadt* ‘I **happened** to see her in town’. A survey of these equivalences is given in 7.4.4.

A feature of these German semi-auxiliary verbs is that **they always enclose the infinitive** in dependent clauses or compound tenses, and they are also often incorporated with a dependent infinitive clause (see 11.2.1a):

... da er den eben Angekommenen **zu erkennen schien**

... als das Boot **zu kentern drohte**

Sie hat uns **zu verstehen gegeben**, dass sie morgen kommt

The most important verbs which can be used as semi-auxiliaries in German are given below. Many of them have other uses and meanings.

bekommen ‘get’:

Und wenn ich dich **zu fassen bekomme** ... *And if I lay hands on you, ...*

belieben ‘like’, ‘wish’. Nowadays archaic except ironically:

Sie **belieben zu scherzen** *You must be joking*

bleiben ‘remain’. The following infinitive has the force of a passive:

Die Gesetzesvorlage **bleibt noch zu diskutieren**

The draft bill still remains to be discussed

For the use of *bleiben* with a **bare infinitive**, see 11.3.1f.

brauchen ‘need’. In this sense it only occurs with a negative (or with *nur* or *bloß*). This is the most common negative to *müssen* (see 15.5.1c):

Du brauchst nur anzurufen , und ich komme sofort eine Sprache, die sie nie zu erlernen brauchten (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>You only need to call and I'll come straight away a language which they never needed to learn</i>
--	--

In colloquial speech, *brauchen* is commonly used without *zu* (see 11.3.1a): *Ich brauche nicht hingehen*.

The infinitive is used rather than the past participle in the perfect tenses (see 11.3.2a): *Du hättest nicht hin(zu)gehen brauchen* and in this context it is considered acceptable to omit *zu*.

drohen ‘threaten’. The subject is typically inanimate in this use:

Oskars Herz drohte zu Stein zu werden (<i>Grass</i>)	<i>Oskar's heart threatened to turn to stone</i>
---	--

geben ‘give’. Used mainly with *denken*, *erkennen*, *verstehen*:

... weil sie uns zu verstehen gab , dass ... sie bald kommen würde	<i>... because she gave us to understand that she would be coming soon</i>
--	--

es gibt ‘there is’ (see 16.2.5) is also used as a semi-auxiliary, e.g... *weil es hier wenig zu trinken gibt*.

gedenken ‘propose’. It is restricted to formal registers:

die Zahl der Truppen, die die Nato nach Afghanistan zu schicken gedenkt	<i>the number of troops which NATO proposes to send to Afghanistan</i>
---	--

gehen ‘go’. The use of *gehen* as a semi-auxiliary is colloquial. It expresses a possibility and the infinitive has passive force (see 13.4.5c):

Die Uhr geht nicht zu reparieren	<i>The clock can't be repaired</i>
--	------------------------------------

For the use of *gehen* with a bare infinitive, see 11.3.1e.

haben ‘have’ expresses necessity or obligation. It is an alternative to *müssen* or *sollen*:

Was **habe** ich **zu bezahlen** ?
Ich **habe** mehrere Mails **zu schreiben**
Sie **haben** hier nichts **zu suchen**

What have I got to pay?
I have several e-mails to write
You have no business here

With some verbs (especially *tun*), this use of *haben* is idiomatic and there is little sense of obligation or necessity:

Das **hat** mit dieser Sache nichts **zu tun** *That's got nothing to do with this matter*
Das **hat** wenig **zu bedeuten** *That doesn't mean very much*

For the use of *haben* with a bare infinitive, see 11.3.1f.

kommen ‘come’ expresses a (chance) result:

Es war nicht meine Absicht, dass wir auf dieses Thema **zu sprechen kamen** *It was not my intention for us to get onto this subject*
Wir arrangierten es so, dass ich neben ihr **zu sitzen kam** *We arranged it so that I came to sit next to her*

For the use of *kommen* with a bare infinitive, see 11.3.1e.

pflegen ‘to be accustomed to’ is restricted to formal registers:

Am Abend dann studierte Stefan die Sonntagsergebnisse der Bundesliga, wie er es immer zu tun pflegte (HMP) *So in the evening Stefan studied the Sunday Bundesliga results, as he always used to do*

scheinen ‘seem’

Ihm **schien** es **zu gefallen**
Das Dorf Lidice, wohin die Spuren der beiden Attentäter **zu führen schienen**,

He seemed to like it
The village of Lidice, where the tracks of the two assassins seemed to lead,

wurde zerstört (*Presse*)

was destroyed

sein ‘be’, as a semi-auxiliary, is the equivalent of *können* (or sometimes *müssen* or *sollen*). The following infinitive has the force of a passive, see 13.4.5a:

Ist der Direktor heute **zu sprechen**?
Die Fahrausweise **sind** auf Verlangen
vorzuzeigen
Das Haus **ist zu verkaufen**

Can I see the manager today?
The tickets are to be shown on
demand
The house is for sale

For the use of *sein* with a bare infinitive, see 11.3.1e.

stehen has a similar sense to *sein*, and the following infinitive also has the force of a passive. It is used mainly with *befürchten*, *erwarten* and *hoffen*:

Es **steht zu erwarten**, dass er bald
nachgibt

It can be expected that he will soon give
in

suchen ‘try’, ‘seek’ is restricted to formal registers:

eine Ordnung, die die selbständige
militärische Betätigung des Adels
einzuschränken suchte (*Bumke*)

a decree which sought to limit the
independent military activities of
the nobility

versprechen ‘promise’. In this sense, *versprechen* refers to an involuntary action with something desirable in the offing. The subject is usually inanimate:

Das Wetter **verspricht schön zu werden**
Wir sind froh, weil das Unternehmen **zu**
gedeihen verspricht

The weather promises to be nice
We are happy because the enterprise
promises to prosper

As a full verb, in the sense of ‘make a promise’, *versprechen* is used with a separated infinitive clause and the subject is always **animate**, e.g. *Der Arzt versprach mir sofort zu kommen*.

verstehen ‘be able to’, ‘know how to’:

Sie war in Verhältnisse geschleudert worden, mit denen sie nicht umzugehen verstand (<i>Fleißer</i>)	<i>She had been catapulted into circumstances which she didn't know how to cope with</i>
--	--

wissen 'know how to'. In this sense *wissen* is similar to *verstehen*:

Er weiß mit den Leuten umzugehen Wie soll zurechtkommen, wer sich in das Gegebene nicht zu schicken weiß ? (<i>Wolf</i>)	<i>He knows how to deal with people How is anyone going to manage who doesn't know how to come to terms with reality?</i>
---	---

11.2.5 The infinitive with *zu* after adjectives

In some infinitive constructions after *sein* used with an adjective, the **subject** of *sein* has to be understood as the **object** of the infinitive:

Diese Aufgabe ist einfach zu lösen	<i>This problem is simple to solve</i>
Er ist leicht zu überzeugen	He is easy to convince
Diese Frage ist schwer zu beantworten	<i>This question is difficult to answer</i>

This construction is common in English, but it is only possible with very few adjectives in German, i.e. ***einfach***, ***interessant***, ***leicht***, ***schwer***, ***schwierig***. In German, too, the construction is only possible if the verb takes an accusative object, i.e. it cannot occur with verbs like *helfen* which govern a dative object. These other English constructions have quite different German equivalents:

Es war schön, sie zu kennen (<i>not * Sie war schön zu kennen</i>)	<i>She was nice to know</i>
Meiner Schwester zu helfen war schwierig Es war schwierig, meiner Schwester zu helfen (<i>not * Meine Schwester war schwierig zu helfen</i>)	<i>My sister was difficult to help</i>
Zum Trinken war der Kaffee zu heiß (<i>not * Der Kaffee war zu heiß zu trinken</i>)	<i>The coffee was too hot to drink</i>

In English adjectives like this can be used attributively (i.e. in front of a noun), with an infinitive depending on them, e.g. ‘That is a **difficult** question **to answer**’. There is no comparable construction in German, and other constructions are used:

Diese Frage zu beantworten ist schwer	} <i>That is a difficult question to answer</i>
Das ist eine schwer zu beantwortende Frage	

Es ist ein leicht erreichbarer Ort	<i>It's an easy place to reach</i>
Es war dumm diese Frage gestellt zu haben	<i>That was a silly question to have asked</i>

11.2.6 The infinitive with *zu* after a preposition

An infinitive with *zu* can be used after four prepositions, i.e. **um**, **ohne**, **(an)statt** and **außer**. These constructions have special meanings and are the equivalent of adverbial clauses. These clauses are always preceded by a comma in writing, see 21.5.3b.

(a) *um* ... *zu* has a number of uses

- (i) It can express purpose, corresponding to English ‘in order to’. It is the equivalent of a clause introduced by *damit* (see 17.5.1):

Ich konnte nichts tun, um ihn zu beruhigen	<i>I couldn't do anything to reassure him</i>
Er zündete das Haus an, um die Versicherung zu kassieren	He set fire to the house (in order) to collect on the insurance
Da war kein Wasser, um das Feuer zu löschen	<i>There was no water to put the fire out</i>

The *um* is sometimes omitted, both in elevated **and** colloquial registers, if the notion of purpose is clear from the context, e.g. *Ich konnte nichts tun ihn zu beruhigen*.

(ii) It is used after an adjective qualified by *zu* or *genug*:

Er ist zu jung , um alles zu verstehen	<i>He is too young to understand everything</i>
Er ist alt genug , um alles zu verstehen	<i>He is old enough to understand everything</i>

um is sometimes omitted, especially in colloquial speech, e.g. *Er ist zu jung alles zu verstehen*.

um...zu can only be used in this context if the subject of the two clauses is the same. If it is different, the conjunction **als dass** has to be used (see 17.5.3), e.g. *Er ist zu jung/nicht alt genug, als dass wir es ihm erklären können*.

(iii) It can be used simply to link clauses, as an equivalent to *und*:

Er betrat die Gaststätte, um sie nach kurzer Zeit wieder zu verlassen	<i>He went into the restaurant, only to leave it again after a short time</i>
--	---

This construction is limited to formal writing and it has been criticized by stylists, as it could be misunderstood to imply purpose and then sound nonsensical, e.g. *Karl ging nach Australien, um dort von einem Auto überfahren zu werden*.

(b) **ohne ... zu** corresponds to English ‘without’ followed by an ‘ing’-form

Er sollte den Gegner ablaufen, ohne ihn per Foul vom Ball zu trennen (HMP)	<i>He ought to run down his opponent without getting the ball off him by fouling him</i>
Er verließ das Haus, ohne gesehen zu werden	<i>He left the house without being seen</i>

With a change of subject, the conjunction **ohne dass** is used (see 17.7g), e.g. *Er*

verließ das Haus, ohne dass Gertrud ihn sah.

(c) *(an)statt ... zu* corresponds to English ‘instead of’ followed by an ‘ing’-form

Er hat gespielt, (an)statt zu arbeiten	<i>He played instead of working</i>
Die Mädchen sollten sich schämen, dass sie einfach abgehauen sind, statt Hilfe zu holen	<i>The girls should be ashamed that they just ran off instead of fetching help</i>
(BrZ)	

A clause with *(an) statt dass*, e.g. *Er hat gespielt, (an)statt dass er gearbeitet hat*, is an alternative to this construction. No change of subject is possible with either *(an) statt zu* or *(an) statt dass*.

(d) *außer ... zu* corresponds to English ‘except’, ‘apart from’ or ‘besides’ with an infinitive

Was konnten sie tun, außer zu protestieren?	<i>What could they do except protest?</i>
(Zeit)	

Using *außer* followed by an infinitive with *zu* is quite recent. A common alternative is to use the preposition *außer* with an infinitive noun, e.g. *Sie tat nichts außer Schlafen*. With a different subject, a clause with the conjunction *außer dass* is used (see 17.7b).

11.2.7 Differences between English and German in the use of infinitives

The infinitive with *zu* is used in fewer types of construction than English infinitives, and it is useful to be aware of the most frequent German equivalents for these English constructions. Typically, German often uses constructions with clauses where English can use an infinitive.

(a) English 'for' followed by an infinitive

English 'for' is often used with a noun or a pronoun together with an infinitive. The most usual German equivalent is a construction with a relative clause, or an adverbial clause, with the conjunction to be used depending on the sense:

Hier sind ein paar Formulare, die Sie ausfüllen sollen	<i>Here are a few forms for you to fill in</i>
Dort war niemand, mit dem wir hätten reden können	<i>There was nobody there for us to talk to</i>
Ihr lag es sehr daran, dass er die Stelle annahm	<i>She was very keen for him to take the job</i>
Er wartete darauf, dass sie ankam	<i>He was waiting for her to arrive</i>
Sie bringt die Fotos, damit wir sie uns ansehen können	<i>She's bringing the photographs for us to look at</i>
Sie muss schon sehr krank sein, wenn ihre Mutter den Arzt angerufen hat	<i>She must be very ill for her mother to have phoned the doctor</i>

In a limited number of contexts German can use a noun with *für*, or a noun in the dative in the main clause:

Es ist Zeit für uns loszugehen	<i>It is time for us to leave</i>
Es war ihm unmöglich, das auch nur zu verstehen	<i>It was impossible for him even to understand that</i>

(b) English 'with' followed by an infinitive

If English 'with' is followed by a noun or a pronoun and an infinitive the German equivalent, depending on the sense, can be a subordinate clause with *da* or *weil*, a main clause with *und*, or a relative clause:

Da ich diesen Aufsatz schreiben muss, werde ich wohl nicht ins Kino gehen können	<i>With this essay to write, I probably shan't be able to go to the cinema</i>
Sie waren nur auf der Durchreise in	<i>They were just passing through Munich, with no more than an hour</i>

München und konnten dort nur ein paar
Stunden verbringen
Auch der Sonntag, an dem sie nicht ins
Büro ging, verging irgendwie

or two to spend
*Even Sunday, with no office to go to,
passed somehow for her*

(c) English infinitives in indirect statements and questions

e.g. 'He told me **how to do it**'. In German a subordinate clause is used, often with a modal auxiliary verb such as *sollen*, *müssen* or *können*:

Er sagte mir, wie ich es machen sollte
Ich weiß nicht, was ich tun soll/muss
Woher weiß man, welchen Knopf man
drücken soll?

*He told me how to do it
I don't know what to do
How do you tell which button to
press?*

(d) English infinitives used after a noun

e.g. 'the person **to apply to**'. A relative clause is used in German:

Ich möchte ein Paar Handschuhe, die zu
meinem Wintermantel passen
das Einzige, was man tun kann

*I want a pair of gloves to go with
my winter coat
the only thing to do*

Constructions like this are especially common after superlatives:

Er war der Erste (der Letzte, der beste
Spieler), der gekommen ist

*He was the first (the last, the best
player) to come*

11.2.8 Other uses of the infinitive with *zu*

(a) In comparative phrases with *als*

zu can be omitted, although it is more usual for it to be included:

Du kannst nichts Besseres tun **als zu Hause (zu) bleiben**

Man sollte lieber erst alles gründlich besprechen **als sofort (zu) streiten**

(b) In exclamations

These are similar to the corresponding English construction:

Und zu denken, dass es ihr nichts
bedeutet hat!

Ach, immer hier zu bleiben!

*And to think it didn't mean anything
to her!*

Oh, to stay here for ever!

(c) In small ads

Zwei-Zimmer-Wohnung ab 1. Mai zu
vermieten

*Two-room apartment to let from
May 1st*

11.3 The infinitive without zu

11.3.1 Verbs used with a 'bare' infinitive without zu

A few common verbs are followed by a so-called 'bare' infinitive, without *zu*, e.g.:

*Ich muss morgen nach Bochum **fahren***

Sie will diese Briefe morgen **schreiben**

Ich weiß, dass sie diese Briefe morgen **schreiben** will

Sie hat diese Briefe heute **schreiben** wollen

The 'bare' infinitive is placed in final position at the end of the clause, and enclosed in subordinate clauses and compound tenses (for further details see 19.1). The following verbs are used with a 'bare' infinitive:

(a) The modal auxiliaries – *dürfen, können, mögen, müssen, sollen, wollen*

(see [Chapter 15](#)):

Sie **darf** heute nicht **ausgehen**
Wir **können** es nicht **verhindern**

Ich **musste** heute früh **aufstehen**
Er wird mir nicht **helfen wollen**

In colloquial speech, ***brauchen*** is often used with a bare infinitive, e.g. *Sie brauchen heute nicht hingehen*. However, this is not universally considered standard, and *brauchen* is still most often used with *zu* in writing: *Sie brauchen heute nicht hinzugehen*. However, in the perfect tense the bare infinitive is accepted, with the infinitive used rather than a past participle (see 11.3.2a), e.g. *Das hättest du wirklich nicht (zu) lesen brauchen*.

(b) The verbs of perception – *fühlen, hören, sehen, spüren*

Ich sah ihn ins Zimmer kommen	<i>I saw him come into the room</i>
Sie hörte das Kind weinen	She heard the child crying
Er fühlte sein Herz klopfen	He felt his heart beat(ing)
Ich spürte seinen Einfluss wachsen	<i>I sensed how his influence was growing</i>

With these verbs, a clause with *wie* is an alternative to the infinitive construction:

Ich hörte, wie das Kind weinte	Ich spürte, wie sein Einfluss wuchs
Ich sah, wie der Polizist sich nach dem alten Mann umsah	

This alternative is more frequent in certain contexts, in particular if the sentence is long or complex, with the verbs *fühlen* and *spüren*, and in less formal registers.

(c) *lassen*

lassen with a bare infinitive has two principal meanings:

(i) 'let', 'allow':

Er **ließ** mich das Buch **behalten**
Lass sie doch **hereinkommen** !

He let me keep the book
Do let her come in!

In this sense *lassen* is often used reflexively with a similar force to a passive construction (see 13.4.6):

Das **lässt sich** leicht **ändern**
Das Buch **lässt sich** leicht **lesen**

That can easily be changed
The book is easy to read

(ii) 'cause', 'make':

Sie **ließ** den Schlosser die Tür **reparieren**
Die Nachricht **ließ** ihn **erblassen**
Er **ließ** sich die Haare **schneiden**

She had the locksmith fix the door
The news made him turn pale
He had his hair cut

lassen is never followed by a passive infinitive, but in both meanings the infinitive after *lassen* can express the sense of a passive:

Er **lässt** die Bäume **fällen**
Er **ließ** sich **sehen**
Sie **ließen** die Autobahnen von den
Gefangenen **bauen**

He has the trees felled
He allowed himself to be seen
They had the motorways built by the
prisoners

(d) *tun*

The use of *tun* with a bare infinitive is typical of colloquial speech:

Er **tut** ja immer noch **essen**
Tust du mich auch **verstehen** ?

He's still eating
Do you understand me?

Ich **täte** gern ins Kino **gehen**

I would like to go to the cinema

This usage is widespread and very common in spoken German, but is generally considered to be non-standard, and it is only acceptable in writing to allow an emphasized verb to be placed first in the sentence:

Bewundern tue ich ihn nicht, aber er
imponiert mir doch

*I don't admire him, but he does
impress me*

Aber **schmerzen tat** es darum nicht weniger
(Reuter)

*But it was no less painful for all
that*

(e) Some verbs of motion – *gehen, kommen, fahren, schicken*

The verb in the infinitive expresses the purpose of going:

Während ich **öffnen ging**, ...
(Andersch)

*While I went to open the door, ...
Are you coming swimming today?*

Kommst du heute **schwimmen** ?
Er **fährt** immer vormittags **einkaufen**
Sie hat den Opa **einkaufen geschickt**

He always goes shopping in the
mornings
She sent grandad shopping

This usage is typical of colloquial speech, but it is not restricted to informal registers. In everyday speech, the past and perfect tenses of **sein** can also be used with a bare infinitive to mean 'go':

Ich **war** heute Morgen **schwimmen**
Er **ist einkaufen gewesen**

*I went swimming this morning
He went/has been shopping*

schicken can also be used with *zu* and an infinitive: *Sie hat den Großvater geschickt, Kartoffeln und Gemüse zu kaufen*. This is most usual if the infinitive clause is fairly long.

(f) *bleiben, finden* and *haben* followed by a verb of position

Er blieb im Zimmer sitzen	<i>He stayed sitting in the room</i>
Sie ist an den Ampeln stehen geblieben	She stopped at the lights
Er hat sein Auto vor der Tür stehen	He's got his car at the door
Sie hat einen Bruder in Köln wohnen	She's got a brother living in Cologne
Sie fand das Buch auf dem Boden liegen	<i>She found the book lying on the floor</i>

(i) *stehen bleiben* 'stop' and *sitzen bleiben* 'repeat a year' (at school) have a distinct meaning and can be written as single words (see 20.6.3c).

(ii) For *finden* with the present participle, see 11.6.5c.

(iii) *haben* is also used with a bare infinitive in a few fixed expressions with adjectives, e.g. *Du hast gut / leicht reden* 'It's all very well for you to talk'.

(g) *heißen* 'order', *helfen*, *lehren*, *lernen*

These verbs can be followed by a bare infinitive or by an infinitive with *zu*:

Sie hieß ihn schweigen	<i>She bade him be silent</i>
Er hieß seine Truppen die Burg bis zum letzten Mann zu verteidigen	<i>He ordered his troops to defend the castle to the last man</i>
... und jetzt hilf mir anpacken (<i>Remarque</i>)	<i>... and now give me a hand</i>
Er half Carla die Weinflaschen zu öffnen (<i>Horbach</i>)	He helped Carla to open the wine bottles
Sie lehrte mich kochen	She taught me to cook
Sie lehrte mich Suppe zu kochen	She taught me how to make soup
Er lernte beim Militär Russisch sprechen/zu sprechen	<i>He learnt to speak Russian in the army</i>

(i) This sense of *heißen*, i.e. 'command', is typical of formal literary registers and can sound old-fashioned. In the sense 'mean', *heißen* is always followed by an infinitive without *zu*, see (h) below.

(ii) *kennen lernen* 'meet', 'get to know' has developed a distinct lexical meaning and can be written as a single word (see 20.6.3c).

The construction with *zu* tends to be used with longer and more complex

infinitive clauses. However, the bare infinitive is preferred if the alternative is an awkward construction, e.g.:

Es geht darum, die seit vierzig Jahren
geforderte Freiheit der osteuropäischen
Völker verwirklichen zu helfen (FR) (i.e.
not zu verwirklichen zu helfen)

*It is a matter of helping the
peoples of Eastern Europe to
realize the freedom which has
been demanded for forty years*

(h) A few other verbs in certain constructions or idioms

(i) With *machen* in some idioms, i.e. *von sich reden machen* ‘become a talking point’ and *jdn. etwas glauben machen* ‘convince sb. of sth.’, and when used with a few other verbs, i.e. *jdn. gruseln, lachen, schwindeln, weinen, zittern machen* ‘make sb. have the creeps, laugh, feel dizzy, cry, tremble’.

(ii) A bare infinitive is used as the complement of *heißen* ‘be (the equivalent of)’, ‘mean’ and *nennen* ‘call’:

Das **heißt** lügen
Das **hieß**e wieder von vorne
anfangen
Das **nennst** du höflich **sein** !

*That amounts to lying
That would mean starting again from
scratch
You call that being polite!*

heißen in the meaning ‘command’ is followed by a bare infinitive **or** an infinitive with *zu*, see (g) above.

(iii) *legen* is followed by a bare infinitive in the idiom *sich schlafen legen* ‘go to bed’, e.g. *Ich legte mich schlafen*.

11.3.2 The use of the infinitive for a past participle

The infinitive is used rather than a past participle in the perfect tenses of some verbs which are followed by a bare infinitive, e.g. *Sie hat kommen wollen* (not

gewollt), see 15.3.2a. This so-called *Ersatzinfinitiv* is used with the following verbs:

(a) the modal auxiliaries

Er hat heute ausgehen **dürfen**
Er hat ihn sehen **müssen**
Karl hatte Sie sehen **wollen**

Wir hätten Ihnen helfen **können**
Sie hätte es machen **sollen**

brauchen also forms its perfect tenses with the infinitive rather than the past participle, whether used with an infinitive with *zu* or with a bare infinitive (see 11.3.1a), e.g. *Wir haben nicht (zu) warten brauchen*.

The past participle is sometimes used with these verbs in spoken German, e.g. *Sie hat arbeiten gemusst, gekonnt, gewollt*, etc. These forms are regarded as incorrect.

(b) *lassen*

Sie hat den Schlosser die Tür **reparieren lassen** Er hat sich die Haare **schneiden lassen**
Er hat sie in das Zimmer **kommen lassen**

The infinitive of *lassen* is generally used rather than the past participle, but it is occasionally heard in the sense of ‘leaving something somewhere’, e.g. *Ich habe Kaffee und Kuchen stehen gelassen* (more usual: *stehen lassen*), and with the combinations *fallen lassen*, *liegen lassen*, etc.

(c) *sehen*, *hören* and other verbs of perception

With *sehen* and *hören*, the norm is to use the infinitive:

Ich habe sie hereinkommen **sehen** *I saw her come in*
Sie hatte ihn nicht kommen **hören** *She hadn’t heard him come*

The past participle can also be used with these verbs, e.g. *Sie hatte ihn nicht kommen gehört*, but this is less frequent.

fühlen and *spüren* are now almost exclusively used with a past participle, e.g. *Sie hat die Katastrophe kommen gefühlt*.

(d) helfen, heißen and other verbs used with a bare infinitive

Both the infinitive and the past participle are accepted with all these verbs, but there are differences in frequency of usage.

(i) With *helfen*, the infinitive is more usual than the past participle:

Sie hat ihm den Koffer **tragen helfen** (*also common: tragen geholfen*)

(ii) With *heißen* the infinitive and the past participle are almost equally common:

Wer hat dich **kommen heißen** / **geheißen** ?

(iii) With other verbs, especially *lehren* and *lernen*, the past participle is the norm:

Er hat Chinesisch **sprechen gelernt** (*unusual: sprechen lernen*)

In subordinate clauses the auxiliary precedes these double infinitives: *Er sagte, dass sie es hätte machen sollen* / ..., dass sie den Koffer **hat** tragen helfen, etc. (see 15.1.4d and 19.1.3b).

11.3.3 Other uses of the bare infinitive

(a) in commands, in place of an imperative

The use of the infinitive with the force of a command is particularly frequent in official language and instructions, see also 14.1.3a:

Nicht rauchen! Bitte anschnallen! *No smoking! Fasten seat-belts!*

(b) in isolation, especially in elliptical questions, wishes and the like

Wie? Alles vergessen und vergeben?	<i>What? (Am I supposed to) forgive and</i>
Wozu sich weiter bemühen?	<i>forget?</i>
Was möchtest du jetzt? – Schlafen	<i>Why (should we) bother further?</i>
bis Mittag!	<i>What would you like to do now? – Sleep till</i>
	<i>lunchtime!</i>

11.4 Infinitives used as nouns

11.4.1 Making and using nouns from the infinitive of verbs

The infinitive of almost any verb can be used as a noun in German without any further changes. They are always **neuter**, see 1.1.6e, and they are spelled with a capital letter, e.g. *das Schlafen*, *das Sehen*, *das Sprechen*.

(a) Infinitival nouns often correspond to English ‘ing’-forms used as nouns

Ich hörte das laute Bellen eines Hundes	<i>I heard the loud barking of a dog</i>
Nach monatelangem Warten erhielt sie die	<i>After waiting for months she</i>
Nachricht von seinem Erfolg	<i>received news of his success</i>
Das Mitnehmen von Hunden ist polizeilich	<i>Bringing dogs in is forbidden by</i>
verboten	<i>law</i>
die Kunst des Schreibens	<i>the art of writing</i>

(b) The pronoun *sich* is usually omitted in infinitival nouns from

reflexive verbs

- (i) This is especially the case if the use of the infinitive as a noun is well-established and frequent, e.g. *das Benehmen* 'behaviour' (from *sich benehmen* 'behave').
- (ii) However, *sich* may be included to avoid ambiguity, e.g. *die Kunst des Sichäußerns* 'the art of expressing oneself'. *das Äußern* could mean something different.
- (iii) *sich* tends to be included with forms which have not yet become established usage, e.g. *dieses ständige Sichumschauen* 'this continual looking round', *das meditative Sichannähern an Gott* 'coming closer to God through meditation', *das Sichnichtbegnügenkönnen (Süßkind)* 'not being able to be satisfied'.

There is often uncertainty in how to spell nouns from reflexive verbs, and spellings like *das sich Äußern* are sometimes seen, although they are incorrect.

(c) Infinitival nouns are not used in the plural

This is because, like the English 'ing'-form, they simply express the action denoted by the verb. However, a few established forms, with extended meanings, can be used in the plural, see 11.4.3.

(d) Compound infinitival nouns

Infinitival nouns can be compounded with the object or another part of the clause, e.g.:

das Zeitunglesen *reading the newspaper* *das Rückwärtsfahren* *reversing*

das Schlafengehen *going to bed*

If there are several words in these additional elements, they are normally written with hyphens, e.g.:

dieses ständige Mit-sich-selbst-Beschäftigen (SWF) das Auf-die-lange-Bank-Schieben

The first word, the infinitive, and any nouns in the combination are all spelled with capital letters.

(e) Widespread use of infinitival nouns is typical of written German

They are especially frequent in technical registers, e.g.:

In der Bundesrepublik beginnt sich diese Basis humanen Miteinanderlebens , Unterein-anderaussprechens und Miteinander-wirkens aufzulösen (FAZ)	<i>In the Federal Republic this basic principle of living together humanely, freely exchanging ideas and co-operating is beginning to dissolve</i>
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11.4.2 Infinitival nouns with prepositions

The preposition is fused with the appropriate form of the definite article in these constructions (see 4.1.1c).

(a) *am* + infinitival noun

am is used with an infinitival noun to express continuous action (see also 12.5):

Paula ist am Tanzen Der Ölpreis ist wieder am Sinken Während die Piraten noch auf der Insel am Feiern sind, läuft die „Neptun“ wieder aus mit Kurs auf Spanien (Zeit)	<i>Paula is dancing</i> The price of oil is dropping again <i>While the pirates are still celebrating on the island, the ‘Neptune’ sets sail for Spain again</i>
--	--

This usage was originally a North-West German regionalism, but its use has now spread, even in written German, although it is not fully accepted as standard.

(b) *beim* + infinitival noun

This usually corresponds to an English progressive tense (see 12.5), English ‘on’ with an ‘ing’-form, or an adverbial time clause with ‘when’ or ‘as’:

Beim Erwachen am Morgen erschrak ich
eine Sekunde lang (*Frisch*)
Die Brücke war so dicht mit vierstöckigen
Häusern bebaut, dass man **beim**
Überschreiten den Fluss nicht zu Gesicht
bekam (*Süßkind*)

*On waking up/When I woke up in
the morning I was frightened for
an instant*

*The bridge was so densely built up
with four-storey houses that you
couldn't see the river as you
crossed it*

(c) *ins* + infinitival noun

This combination is used with *geraten* or *kommen* to form phrasal verbs denoting the beginning of an action:

Der Ball geriet/kam **ins Rollen**
Der Turm kam/geriet **ins Schwanken**
Der Wagen kam **ins Schleudern**

*The ball started rolling
The tower started to sway
The car went into a skid*

(d) *zum* + infinitival noun

(i) *zum* with an infinitival noun expresses purpose, often corresponding to English ‘for’ with an ‘ing’-form or to an infinitive with ‘to’:

Zum Fußballspielen ist der Garten viel
zu klein
Ich gebrauche den Computer vor allem
zum Spielen von Games
Der Kaffee ist zu heiß **zum Trinken**

*The garden is much too small for
playing football in
I use the computer more than
anything for playing games
The coffee is too hot to drink*

(ii) Some combinations of infinitival nouns with *zum* are idiomatic:

Das ist doch zum Lachen, zum Kotzen, zum Verrücktwerden	<i>But that's laughable, enough to make you sick, enough to drive you mad</i>
--	---

(iii) **bis zum** with an infinitival noun is used for 'until':

Bitte bewahren Sie den Fahrschein bis zum Verlassen des Bahnhofs	<i>Please retain your ticket until you leave the station</i>
---	--

(iv) Combinations of infinitival nouns with *zum* with *bringen* or *kommen* form phrasal verbs expressing the completion of an action:

zum Halten bringen/kommen	<i>bring/come to a stop</i>
zum Kochen bringen/kommen	<i>bring/come to the boil</i>

11.4.3 Infinitival nouns with extended meanings

Some infinitival nouns have lost their link to the verb they came from and no longer simply express the action denoted by it but have developed additional meanings, so that most of them can be used in the plural. Some common examples:

das Andenken	<i>souvenir</i>	das Schrecken	<i>terror</i>
das Benehmen	behaviour	das Unternehmen	enterprise
das Dasein	existence	das Verbrechen	crime
das Einkommen	income	das Vergnügen	pleasure
das Essen	meal	das Vermögen	wealth
das Gutachten	reference	das Versprechen	promise
das Guthaben	credit balance	das Vorhaben	<i>intention</i>
das Leben	<i>life</i>		

11.5 The present and past participles

Aside from the use of the past participle to form the perfect tenses and the

passive (see 10.3–10.4), the German participles are chiefly employed as adjectives (see 11.5.1) or in participial clauses (see 11.5.2).

In English, the two participles are usually called the **PRESENT PARTICIPLE** (e.g. *lesend*, *überwältigend*, etc.), and the **PAST PARTICIPLE** (e.g. *gestellt*, *geworfen*, etc.). These terms are rather misleading, as the participles do not necessarily refer to present or past time, and they are often referred to as *das erste Partizip* and *das zweite Partizip* in German (or simply *Partizip I* and *Partizip II*).

11.5.1 The participles used as adjectives

(a) Most German present and past participles can be used as adjectives

This is their most frequent use outside the compound tenses:

die schreienden Vögel	mein verlorener Schirm
das kochende Wasser	der gehasste Feind

(b) Participles can be used as nouns

In this respect they are like other adjectives (see 6.2).

die Streikenden	<i>the people on strike</i>	die Gehasste	<i>the detested woman</i>
der Sterbende	<i>the dying man</i>	das Hervorragende	<i>the outstanding thing</i>
ein bitterer Kampf zwischen Habenden und Habenichtsen, zwischen Überfütterten und Zukurzgekommenen (Zeit)	<i>a bitter struggle between the haves and the have-nots, between the overfed and those who have come off badly</i>		

Many such participles used as nouns have taken on special meanings, e.g. *der/die Abgeordnete* ‘member of parliament’, *der/die Vorsitzende* ‘chairperson’, etc. More

of these are given in 6.2.3.

(c) Participles can be used as adverbs

In this respect they are like other adjectives. They mainly become adverbs of manner or viewpoint, see 7.4.1c:

Er hat die Sache überraschend schnell erledigt	<i>He settled the matter surprisingly quickly</i>
Sie rannten schreiend davon, als sie ihn sahen (<i>Süßkind</i>)	<i>They ran off screaming when they saw him</i>
Die alte Frau ging gebückt zum Rathaus hin	<i>The old woman was walking with a stoop towards the town-hall</i>

(d) Participles are often compounded

Adjectives are typically compounded with the object of the verb, or with a qualifying adverb. These compounds can then also be used as nouns or adverbs in the same way as simple participles. They are especially frequent in written German:

Vancouver ist eine Stadt von atemberaubender Schönheit die Arbeitsuchenden ein weichgekochtes Ei Tiefgefrorenes	<i>Vancouver is a breathtakingly beautiful city the people looking for work a soft-boiled egg frozen food</i>
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(e) Present participles can be used adjectivally with an accompanying *zu*

e.g. *das abzufertigende Gepäck* ‘the baggage for checking’. This is an adjectival form of the construction with *sein* and an infinitive with *zu* expressing possibility or necessity, i.e. *Das Gepäck ist abzufertigen* (see 11.2.4). As in that construction

the participle has passive force:

ein nicht zu übersehender Fehler	<i>a mistake which cannot be overlooked</i>
ihre anzuerkennende Leistung	her achievement which must be acknowledged
ein Auszubildender	<i>a trainee</i>

As the last example shows, these forms, too, can be used as nouns. This construction is very frequent in formal registers, especially in officialese.

(f) The extended participial phrase

In German, a participle used adjectivally can be expanded leftwards by adding objects and/or adverbials. In this way, what in English would be a phrase or a relative clause placed **after** the noun can appear in German as an extended adjectival phrase placed **before** the noun:

Die um ihre eigenen Arbeitsplätze fürchtenden Stahlarbeiter wollten nicht streiken (FR)	<i>The steelworkers, who were afraid for their own jobs, did not want to strike</i>
Ich habe dieses von meinem Vetter warm empfohlene Buch mit Genuss gelesen	I enjoyed reading this book which was strongly recommended to me by my cousin
Wegen Überproduktion entlassene Arbeiter demonstrierten im Fabrikhof	Workers who had been laid off on account of overproduction were demonstrating in the factory yard
eine von allen echten Demokraten zu begrüßende Entwicklung	<i>a development which must be welcomed by all true democrats</i>

These extended adjectival phrases can be made into nouns, e.g. *das wirklich Entscheidende* ‘what is really decisive’, *die soeben Angekommenen* ‘the people who have just arrived’, etc.

This construction is very common in formal written German, especially in non-literary registers (journalism, official writing, technical writing and all kinds of non-fiction), but it is hardly used in speech. The following example shows that there can be a considerable distance between the article and the noun in phrases

of this kind:

Zwar gilt **der** in den vergangenen vier Jahren auf der Basis einer deutsch-amerikanischen Regierungsvereinbarung für bislang 552 Millionen Mark entwickelte **Panzer** als Spitzenmodell seiner Klasse (*Spiegel*)

Although such constructions typically occur with participles, they are used with other adjectives, too: *eine für sie ganz typische* Haltung (see 6.1.6).

(g) Lexicalization of participles used as adjectives

Many participles used as adjectives have become **lexicalized**, i.e. they have developed a meaning distinct from that of the original verb, so that they are now felt to be independent adjectives rather than simply the participles of a particular verb.

A clear indication of this is that lexicalized participles can be used with the usual comparative and superlative endings, e.g. *spannender*, *am spannendsten* ‘more, most exciting’. With true participles, *mehr* and *meist* are used, see 6.5.1h.

Another indication of lexicalization is the possibility of using the prefix *un-* with some of them, e.g. *(un) bedeutend* ‘(in)significant’, *(un) angebracht* ‘(in)appropriate’, etc. A selection of frequently used lexicalized participles is given below.

- Lexicalized present participles

abstoßend	<i>repulsive</i>	empörend	<i>outrageous</i>
abwesend	absent	entscheidend	decisive
ansteckend	infectious	glühend	glowing
anstrengend	strenuous	reizend	charming
anwesend	present	rührend	touching
auffallend	<i>conspicuous</i>	spannend	exciting
aufregend	<i>exciting</i>	überraschend	surprising
bedeutend	significant	überzeugend	convincing
beruhigend	reassuring	umfassend	extensive
dringend		verblüffend	amazing

drückend
einleuchtend

urgent
oppressive
reasonable

verlockend
wütend

tempting
furious

These lexicalized present participles can also be used as the complement of the verb *sein*:

ein **spannender** Film
der Film war **spannend**

an exciting film
the film was exciting

True present participles cannot be used like this in German, and these lexicalized participles are not to be confused with the ‘ing’ - forms of the English progressive tenses. Compare:

die **brennenden** Lichter
die Lichter **brannten**

the burning lights
the lights were burning

i.e. *not* * *die Lichter waren brennend*. German present participles cannot be used with *sein* to form progressive tenses like the English ‘ing’ - form with the verb ‘be’ (see also 12.5).

- Lexicalized past participles

angebracht

appropriate

belegt

occupied

angesehen

respected

erfahren

experienced

aufgebracht

outraged

gelehrt

scholarly

aufgeregt

excited

geschickt

clever

ausgezeichnet

excellent

verliebt

in love

bekannt

famous

verrückt

insane

Some lexicalized past participles are archaic and are no longer the current past participle of the verb in question, e.g.:

erhaben *illustrious*

(*erheben* ‘raise’ – modern past participle *erhoben*)

gediegen *solid, upright*

(*gedeihen* ‘prosper’ – modern past participle *gediehen*)

verhohlen *secret*

(*verhehlen* ‘conceal’ – modern past participle *verhehlt*)

verworren *confused* (verwirren ‘confuse’ – modern past participle *verwirrt*)

A few adjectives which look like past participles are in fact not from verbs at all, e.g. *beleibt* ‘portly’ and *benachbart* ‘neighbouring’. These come directly from the nouns *der Leib* ‘body’ and *der Nachbar* ‘neighbour’ – there are no verbs **beleiben* or **benachbaren*.

11.5.2 Clauses with participles

Both present and past participles can be used to construct non-finite clauses. These can have the force of an adjective, qualifying a noun or pronoun, or of an adverb, giving the circumstances of the action. The participle is usually placed last in the clause, but, exceptionally, it may come earlier.

Participial clauses are restricted to formal written registers. In particular, those with present participles can sound stilted and they are used much less frequently than clauses with ‘ing’-forms in English. In practice, English learners are best advised to avoid them entirely in German and use instead one of the alternatives detailed in 11.6.

(a) Clauses with the present participle

The present participle used in a non-finite clause indicates an action taking place **at the same time** as that of the finite verb in the main clause:

Den Schildern **folgend**, fanden sie das
Krankenhaus (*Walser*)

*Following the signs, they found the
hospital*

Ich putzte **auf dem Brett stehend** das
Fenster von außen (*Spiegel*)
eine ständige Verbesserung des
Automobils nach den Möglichkeiten der
Zeit, **doch zugleich immer aufbauend**
auf das Erreichte (*Mercedes advert*)

I was cleaning the window from the
outside, standing on the plank
*a continuous improvement of the car
according to the possibilities of the
time, but at the same time always
building on what has been achieved*

(b) Clauses with the past participle

The meaning of the **past participle** in a non-finite clause **differs according to the type of verb**.

(i) With **intransitive verbs**, the past participle has an **active** (i.e. not passive) sense, and refers to an action which has taken place before that indicated by the finite verb in the main clause:

Der neue Lehrer, in Freiburg angekommen , suchte das Humboldt- Gymnasium auf	<i>Having arrived in Freiburg, the new teacher went to the Humboldt Secondary School</i>
---	--

(ii) With **transitive verbs**, the past participle has the force of a **passive**. If the verb denotes a **continuous action**, the participle refers to an **action simultaneous** with that of the finite verb in the main clause:

Der Zug, von zwei Lokomotiven gezogen , fuhr in den Bahnhof ein Da saß eine zarte Dame mit einem zarten Gesicht, umrahmt von einem blonden Pagenkopf	<i>The train, which was being pulled by two locomotives, came into the station There sat a delicate lady with a delicate face, which was framed by blond hair cut in the page-boy style</i>
---	---

(iii) With **transitive verbs** which denote a **momentary action**, the past participle refers to an action which has taken place **before** that of the finite verb in the main clause:

Der Flüchtling, von seinen Freunden gewarnt , verließ sein Versteck Zwar hatte dieses Mal der Dolch, durch ein seidenes Unterkleid abgelenkt , das Opfer nicht sogleich tödlich getroffen (Heyse)	<i>The fugitive, (who had been) warned by his friends, left his hiding-place Nevertheless, this time the dagger, deflected by a silk petticoat, had not immediately wounded the victim fatally</i>
---	--

(c) Comparative clauses can be formed with *wie* and a past participle:

eine Betonburg, wie von einem anderen Stern in diesen Wald gefallen (<i>Walser</i>)	<i>a concrete castle, as if it had fallen into this forest from another star</i>
--	--

In general, this construction is also typical of formal registers, but some have become established idioms and are more widely used:

Also, wie ausgemacht : Wir treffen uns um acht wie gesagt, wie erwartet wie gehabt, wie gewöhnlich	<i>Well, then, as arranged, we'll meet at eight o'clock as I said, as expected as before, as usual</i>
--	--

(d) A clause with a past participle can be introduced by *obwohl*

This is similar to the English construction with '(al)though':

Obwohl von seinen Kollegen geachtet, war er nicht sehr beliebt	<i>Although respected by his colleagues, he was not very popular</i>
---	--

No other conjunction can introduce a participial clause in German.

11.5.3 Other uses of the past participle

(a) Elliptical use of the past participle

The past participle is sometimes used in isolation as an exclamation or an impersonal command. Many such forms have become idiomatic:

Verdammt! Verflucht (noch mal)!	<i>Blast!</i>
Frisch gewagt!	Let's get on with it!
Aufgepasst!	<i>Watch out!</i>

For further details, see 14.1.3b.

(b) The past participle after *finden*

This corresponds closely to the English construction:

Ich fand sie vor dem Ofen zusammengesunken	<i>I found her slumped in front of the stove</i>
Du wirst ihn dort aufgebahrt finden	<i>You will find him laid out there</i>

For the use of *finden* with a present participle, see 11.6.5c.

(c) The past participle after *kommen*

This corresponds to an English 'ing'-form with 'come':

Er kam ins Zimmer gelaufen	<i>He came running into the room</i>
Sie kam herbeigeeilt	<i>She came hurrying along</i>

(d) The past participle after *bleiben* and *scheinen*

bleiben and *scheinen* can be used with a following past participle in a construction which is similar to English:

Ihr Brief blieb unbeantwortet *Her letter remained unanswered*

Die Tür schien geschlossen *The door seemed/appeared closed*

The participle with these verbs has a similar force to that of the *sein* -passive, see 13.2.2c.

11.6 English constructions with the '-ing' form

The English 'ing'-form is used much more widely than the German present participle, which is used mainly as an adjective (see 11.5.1). In other contexts, different constructions are usually preferred in German. In particular, the German present participle is not often used in participial clauses (see 11.5.2), and it is generally advisable for English learners to avoid attempting to use clauses with the present participle in German. The equivalents given below for constructions with the English 'ing'-form represent more idiomatic German usage.

11.6.1 The English 'ing'-form used as a noun

The usual German equivalent is one of the following. As some of the examples show, it is often the case that more than one of these alternatives is possible.

(a) An infinitive used as a noun, or another noun derived from a verb

(see also 11.4 and 20.2):

Aufmerksames **Zuhören** ist wichtig
die Freuden des **Skilaufens**
Warum hat man die **Eröffnung** der neuen
Schule aufgeschoben?
Er ist einer solchen **Tat** nicht fähig

*Attentive listening is important
the pleasures of skiing
Why has the opening of the new
school been delayed?
He is not capable of doing such a
thing*

(b) An infinitive clause with *zu*

Es ist wichtig aufmerksam **zuzuhören**
Er gab zu das Fenster **zerbrochen zu haben**
Ich verlasse mich darauf, ihn zu Hause **zu
finden**

*Attentive listening is important
He admitted having broken the
window
I rely on finding him at home*

(c) A *dass*-clause

Es ist wichtig, dass man aufmerksam zuhört	<i>Attentive listening is important</i>
Er gab zu, dass er das Fenster zerbrochen	He admitted having broken the
hatte	window
Ich verlasse mich darauf, dass ich ihn zu	<i>I rely on finding him at home</i>
Hause finde	

This alternative must be used if the English ‘ing’-form has a different subject to that of the main verb:

Ich kann es mir nicht vorstellen, dass sie ihren Ring verkauft	<i>I can't imagine her selling her ring</i>
Ich verlasse mich darauf, dass er alles arrangiert	<i>I rely on his/him arranging everything</i>

(d) A finite verb

Wer **kocht** bei Ihnen zu Hause? *Who does the cooking at your house?*

The subjectless passive (see 13.1.4) can be used for an English ‘ing’-form after ‘there is/are’:

Überall wurde laut gesungen *There was loud singing everywhere*

For ‘there is/are’ followed by ‘no’ and an ‘ing’-form, a construction with *sich lassen* (see 13.4.6) may be possible:

Das lässt sich nicht leugnen *There's no denying that*

11.6.2 The English 'ing'-form after prepositions

(a) 'by' (or 'through') + 'ing'-form

This construction usually corresponds to a clause with **dadurch**, **dass** or **indem** (see 17.3.1f), or to **durch** followed by an infinitival noun. Thus the following are possible equivalents for the English sentence ‘He escaped by jumping out of the window’:

Er rettete sich **dadurch**, dass er aus dem Fenster sprang

Er rettete sich, **indem** er aus dem Fenster sprang

Er rettete sich **durch** einen Sprung aus dem Fenster

(b) ‘for’ + ‘ing’-form

The commonest equivalents are (**um**) ... **zu** (see 11.2.6a), or **zum** with an infinitival noun (see 11.4.2d):

Sie hat keine Zeit mehr, (um) zu üben	} <i>She no longer has any time for practising</i>
Sie hat keine Zeit mehr zum Üben	

Es ist zu kalt **zum Schwimmen**

It's too cold for swimming

(c) ‘instead of’ + ‘ing’-form

The equivalent is (**an**) **statt** ... **zu** or (**an**) **statt dass** is used (see 11.2.6c):

Er spielt, **anstatt zu arbeiten**/**anstatt dass er**
arbeitet

He is playing instead of
working

(d) ‘on’ + ‘ing’-form

This usually corresponds to a clause with *als* or *wenn*, or *beim* followed by an infinitival noun (see 11.4.2b):

Als sie den Brief las , wurde sie rot	} <i>On reading the letter, she blushed</i>
Beim Lesen des Briefes wurde sie rot	

(e) 'with' + 'ing'-form

This construction has a variety of possible equivalents in German, chiefly subordinate clauses introduced by a conjunction with an appropriate meaning. The range of equivalents is similar to that for participial clauses with 'ing'-forms (see 11.6.3):

Wenn der Berg nur als ein unbestimmtes Gebilde erscheint, wobei sich die Baumgruppen bloß als blasse Schatten zeigen, ...	<i>If the hill only appears as an indefinite shape with the groups of trees showing only as faint shadows, ...</i>
Es ist schön hier, wenn die Sonne durch die Bäume scheint	<i>It's lovely here with the sun shining through the trees</i>
Wir sahen die alte Stadt, über die die zerfallene Burg emporragte	<i>We could see the old town with the ruined castle towering above it</i>
Da der Fluss rasch stieg, mussten Notmaßnahmen getroffen werden	<i>With the river rising rapidly, emergency measures had to be taken</i>
Der Bürgermeister eröffnete die Sitzung unter Ausschluss der Öffentlichkeit	<i>The mayor opened the meeting, with the public being excluded</i>
Sie eilte durch die Stadt, und dabei wehten ihre Haare nach hinten	<i>She raced through the town with her hair streaming behind her</i>

(f) 'without' + ing'-form

This corresponds to *ohne ... zu* or *ohne dass* (see 11.2.6b):

Der Zug fuhr durch, ohne zu halten	<i>The train went through without stopping</i>
Er bot uns seine Hilfe an, ohne dass wir ihn darum bitten mussten	<i>He offered us his help without our / us having to ask him for it</i>

(g) Other prepositions followed by 'ing'-forms

The German equivalent is typically a subordinate clause or an appropriate preposition with an infinitival noun, or another noun derived from a verb:

Nach seiner Ankunft/ Nachdem er angekommen war, ging er sofort zum Rathaus	<i>After arriving he went straight to the town hall</i>
Vor dem Einschlafen/ Bevor er einschlief, hat er schnell die Zeitung gelesen	<i>Before going to sleep he quickly read the newspaper</i>
Trotz seiner Hilfe/ Obwohl er mir geholfen hatte, kam ich zu spät an	<i>In spite of his / him having helped me, I arrived late</i>

11.6.3 Participial clauses with 'ing'-forms

The German equivalent depends on the sense of the clause.

(a) The participial clause and the main verb refer to consecutive or simultaneous actions

- (i) The simplest German equivalent is to use **main clauses** joined by **und**. **dabei** can be used in the second clause to stress that the actions are taking place (or took place) at the same time:

Sie öffnete die Schublade und nahm das Testament heraus	<i>Opening the drawer, she took out the will</i>
Ich saß an seinem Tisch und schrieb einen Brief	<i>I was sitting at his table writing a letter</i>
Er erzählte seine Geschichte und machte (dabei) nach jedem Satz eine Pause	<i>He told his story, pausing after each sentence</i>

In modern German, a clause with *indem* does *not* correspond to English participial clauses like those above, despite what some English handbooks of German have traditionally claimed. For the use of *indem*, see 17.3.1f.

- (ii) A clause introduced by **wobei** can be used if the actions in the two clauses are simultaneous (see also 17.3.8):

Er erzählte seine Geschichte, **wobei** er nach jedem Satz eine Pause machte.

(iii) If the action of the English participial clause precedes that of the main clause, the German equivalent can be a clause with **als**, **wenn** or **nachdem**:

Als wir zum Fenster hinausschauten,
sahen wir einen Polizeiwagen
heranfahen

Wenn man oben auf dem Kirchturm
steht, sieht man das ganze Dorf

Nachdem ich die Briefe beantwortet
hatte, ging ich spazieren

*Looking out of the window, we
saw a police car approaching*

*Standing on top of the church
tower, you can see the whole
village*

*Having answered the letters, I
went for a walk*

(b) Participial clauses which give a reason or cause

In German, a subordinate clause with **da** or **weil** can be used:

Da es schon spät war, gingen wir nach Hause

Weil ich wusste, dass sie verreist war, habe ich
sie nicht angerufen

It being late, we went home

*Knowing that she was away, I
didn't call her*

(c) Participial clauses introduced by a conjunction

Subordinate clauses with the appropriate conjunction are used in German:

Während ich auf dich wartete, habe ich einen
schweren Unfall gesehen

*While waiting for you, I saw a
bad accident*

11.6.4 Clauses with 'ing'-forms used to qualify nouns

These correspond in German to a **relative clause** or, especially in formal written German, to an extended participial phrase (see 11.5.1f):

Er sah ein **in entgegengesetzter
Richtung kommendes** Auto
Er sah ein Auto, **das in
entgegengesetzter Richtung kam**

} *He saw a car coming in the opposite
direction*

Einige Minuten später eilte der Arzt,
der einen kleinen Koffer trug, zum
Krankenhaus hin

*A few minutes later the doctor,
carrying a small suitcase, was hurrying
towards the hospital*

11.6.5 English 'ing'-forms after some verbs

The usual German equivalent of English 'ing'-forms after verbs is an infinitive with *zu* or a clause, see 11.6.1. However, a few verbs are special cases.

(a) verbs of perception

i.e. 'see', 'hear', 'feel'. The English 'ing'-form corresponds to a **bare infinitive** or a **clause with *wie*** (see 11.3.1b):

Ich höre die Vögel laut **singen**
Ich höre, **wie die Vögel laut singen**

} *I can hear the birds singing loudly*

(b) verbs of motion

e.g. 'go', 'come', 'send', etc. If the 'ing'-form expresses purpose, a **bare infinitive** is used in German (see 11.3.1e):

Wir gehen heute **schwimmen**

We're going swimming today

Kommst du heute mit **schwimmen** ? Are you coming swimming with us today?

Sie schickte ihn **einkaufen**

She sent him shopping

The past participle is used after *kommen*, e.g. *Sie kam herangelaufen* 'She came running up', see 11.5.3c.

(c) *ing*-form expressing position

i.e. *standing, sitting*, etc. after *find, have, remain, stay*

- (i) German uses a **bare infinitive** after *bleiben, finden, haben* and *lassen* (see 11.3.1):

Sie **blieb** neben dem Ofen **sitzen**
Ich **fand** ihn am Fenster **stehen**
Haben Sie einen Mantel in der
Garderobe **hängen** ?
Sie **ließ** ihre Sachen **herumliegen**

She remained sitting by the stove
I found him standing by the
window
Have you got a coat hanging in the
wardrobe?
She left her things lying about

- (ii) *finden* can also be used with the present participle of many verbs, e.g.:

Sie fand ihn **schlafend**. Er fand sie Pilze **suchend** im Wald.

This construction is also possible with verbs of place, as an alternative to the infinitive (see 11.3.1f):

Sie fand das Buch auf dem Boden **liegend/liegen**.

(d) ‘keep’ + ‘ing’-form

A frequent equivalent is *lassen* with a **bare infinitive**, see 11.3.1c:

Sie **ließ** uns **warten** *She kept us waiting*

(e) ‘keep’/‘go on’ + ‘ing’-form

The simplest idiomatic equivalent is the adverb *weiter* with the verb (see 7.4.4):

Sie sang **weiter** *She kept/went on singing*

(f) ‘need’, ‘want’ + ‘ing’-form

These most often correspond to **müssen**, see 15.5.1b:

Das **muss** noch erklärt werden
Man **muss** sich um sie kümmern

That still needs/wants explaining
She needs/wants looking after

(g) ‘can’t help’ + ‘ing’-form

einfach müssen is the commonest German equivalent, see 15.3.6:

Sie musste einfach lachen *She couldn’t help laughing*

12

The tenses

The grammatical category of TENSE involves the indication of time through special forms of the verb (see 10.1.1b). This chapter deals with the uses of the tenses of the INDICATIVE MOOD (i.e. not the subjunctive) in German:

- The **present tense** (section 12.1)
- The **past** and the **perfect tenses** (section 12.2)
- The **future tenses** (section 12.3)
- The **pluperfect tense** (section 12.4)
- The **English progressive tenses** (section 12.5)

German has six tenses, as illustrated for the verb *kaufen* ‘buy’ in [Table 12.1](#). These are:

- two SIMPLE tenses: PRESENT and PAST
- four COMPOUND tenses: PERFECT, PLUPERFECT, FUTURE and FUTURE PERFECT

[Table 12.1](#) German and English tenses

Present	ich kaufe	<i>I buy</i>
Past	ich kaufte	I bought
Perfect	ich habe gekauft	I have bought
Pluperfect	ich hatte gekauft	I had bought
Future	ich werde kaufen	I shall/will buy
Future Perfect	ich werde gekauft haben	<i>I shall/will have bought</i>

The CONJUGATION (i.e. the forms) of the tenses in German is explained in [Chapter](#)

[10](#) and shown there in full in the following tables:

- [Table 10.10](#): the **simple tenses** of **regular verbs**
- [Table 10.11](#): the **simple tenses** of the irregular verbs *haben*, *sein* and *werden*
- [Table 10.12](#): the **simple tenses** of the **modal auxiliary verbs** and *wissen*
- [Table 10.13](#): the **compound tenses**

The forms and uses of the tenses in German and English are quite similar (except that German has no PROGRESSIVE tenses, see section 12.5), and this chapter concentrates on the uses of German tenses which differ from those of the corresponding English tenses.

[Table 12.1](#) illustrates the tenses of the ACTIVE voice of *kaufen*. The same tenses are also found in the PASSIVE voice, with the same meanings, as shown in [Chapter 13](#).

This chapter only deals with the tenses of the INDICATIVE mood. The SUBJUNCTIVE mood also has tense forms, but these are used in a rather different way, as explained in [Chapter 14](#).

[12.1 The present tense](#)

[12.1.1 The main use of the present tense](#)

The present tense is most often used to relate **present**, **habitual** or ‘**timeless**’ actions or events. This corresponds to the main use of the present tense (simple or progressive) in English:

Sie singt gut	<i>She sings/is singing well</i>
Ich lese die Zeitung von gestern	I’m reading yesterday’s newspaper
Dankend bestätigen wir den Empfang	We gratefully acknowledge receipt of

Ihres Schreibens vom 30. Juni
Ursula **spricht** ein wenig Spanisch
In Irland **regnet** es viel

your letter of 30th June
Ursula speaks a little Spanish
It rains a lot in Ireland

12.1.2 The present tense in ‘up-to-now’ contexts

The German present tense can indicate an action or state which **began in the past and is still going on at the moment of speaking**. Sentences like this typically contain an adverb (*schon* or *bisher*), an adverbial phrase with *seit*, or an adverbial clause with *seit (dem)* or *solange*. These all express the idea of ‘up to now’.

(a) German most often uses the present tense in ‘up-to-now’ contexts

This is strikingly different to English, which uses the **perfect** tense (typically the **perfect progressive**) in such contexts:

Ich stehe schon lange hier vor dem Bahnhof	<i>I’ve been standing here in front of the station for a long time</i>
Seit wann kennst du Frau Wiegand?	How long have you known Mrs Wiegand?
Ich suche sie seit vier Jahren zu verstehen (C. Weyden)	I have been trying to understand her for four years
Seitdem die Spanier die deutschen Finanzämter darüber informieren , wurden viele Villen rasch verkauft (HMP)	Since the Spanish have informed the German tax authorities about this, a lot of villas have been swiftly sold off
Er wohnt in Hamburg, solange ich ihn kenne	<i>He’s been living in Hamburg as long as I’ve known him</i>

(b) In a few ‘up-to-now’ contexts German uses the perfect tense

These are exceptions to the general rule given in (a) above. There are two main

types of such contexts:

(i) in **negative statements**:

Ich habe ihn seit Jahren nicht gesehen Seitdem ich ihn kenne, haben wir uns nie gestritten	<i>I haven't seen him for years Since I've known him, we have never quarrelled</i>
--	--

However, the present tense is used in negative statements if there has been a **continuous action** or **state** lasting up to the present time:

Seit Weihnachten arbeitet er nicht mehr Seitdem ich hier im Dorf wohne, bin ich nie einsam	<i>He hasn't worked since Christmas Since I've been living here in the village, I've never been lonely</i>
---	--

(ii) when referring to a **series of repeated actions** or **states**:

Er ist seit Weihnachten mehrmals krank gewesen Seit ihrer Erkrankung/Seitdem sie krank ist, hat sie viele Bücher gelesen	<i>He's been ill several times since Christmas Since she's been ill, she has read a lot of books</i>
---	--

However, the present tense is used to refer to a **habit** or **state** which has **continued up to the present** moment. English uses a progressive tense in contexts like this, as can be seen by comparing this example with the one above:

Seit ihrer Erkrankung/Seitdem sie krank ist, liest sie viele Bücher	<i>Since she's been ill, she's been reading a lot of books</i>
---	--

(c) The present tense of ***kommen*** is often used to refer to the **immediate past**

Here too, the idea is of an action continuing up to the present moment. English normally uses the perfect tense:

Ich **komme**, die Miete zu bezahlen *I've come to pay the rent*

12.1.3 The present tense referring to the future

German often uses the present tense to refer to the future. This is often possible in English, too:

Der Match beginnt um 17 Uhr	<i>The match starts at 5 o'clock</i>
Heute Nachmittag fahren wir nach Zürich	<i>We're going to Zurich this afternoon</i>

However, this use of the present is much more restricted in English than German, which can often use the present in contexts where a future tense is needed in English. This applies whether English uses the future form with 'will / shall / 'll' or 'be going to':

In zwei Stunden bin ich wieder da	<i>I'll be back in two hours</i>
Wir finden es nie	<i>We're never going to find it</i>

In practice, the present tense is much more frequent than the future in German to refer to future time as long as it is clear from the context that the future is meant. This is especially the case if there is an adverbial in the sentence pointing to the future:

Ich schreibe den Brief heute Abend	<i>I'll write the letter tonight</i>
Morgen um diese Zeit bin ich in Wien	<i>This time tomorrow I'll be in Vienna</i>

The present tense can always be used in German to refer to future time even when no adverbial is present, as long as the context points unambiguously to the future:

Astrid holt uns von der Bahn ab	<i>Astrid is going to meet us from the station</i>
Ich erwarte, dass sie kommt	<i>I expect she'll come</i>
Weitere Einzelheiten erteilt Ihnen unser Fachpersonal	<i>Our specialist staff will give you further information</i>

Vielleicht **sage** ich es ihm

Perhaps I'll tell him

In practice, the only contexts where a future tense needs to be used in German are those where the present tense could be interpreted as referring to the present, i.e. if the rest of the context does not make the reference to the future clear.

Compare the following pairs of sentences, where we must use the future tense in German if we want to make it clear that the future is meant, because the present tense could only be understood to refer to the present:

Er wird wieder in der Bank arbeiten	<i>He's going to work at the bank again</i>
Er arbeitet wieder in der Bank	He's working at the bank again
Ich werde auf euch warten	I'll be waiting for you
Ich warte auf euch	I'm waiting for you
Sie weiß, was geschehen wird	She knows what will happen
Sie weiß, was geschieht	<i>She knows what is happening</i>

If the **future tense** is used where it would be possible to use the present tense, it often emphasizes the idea of a **prediction**, an **intention** or a **supposition** (as is typically the case with the German future tense, see 12.3). In English we often use *be going to* (rather than *will/shall*) in such contexts, as this tends to emphasize intention more strongly:

Es wird morgen wieder regnen	<i>It is going to rain again tomorrow</i>
Ich werde den Brief heute Abend schreiben	I am going to write the letter tonight
Wir aber fliegen dorthin, wo die Sonne scheint, und keine Wolken werden uns jetzt noch stoppen (Grzimek)	<i>But we're flying to where the sun shines, and no clouds are going to stop us now</i>

12.1.4 The present tense referring to the past

This so-called '**historic present**' is used quite frequently in writing in German, probably more so than in English. It makes the past seem more immediate and it

is a common stylistic device in narrative fiction and historical writing:

Mit zuckenden Nerven **marschieren** sie näher, noch immer **versuchen** sie sich gegenseitig zu täuschen, so sehr sie alle schon die Wahrheit **wissen**: dass die Norweger, dass Amundsen ihnen zuvorgekommen ist. Bald **zerbricht** der letzte Zweifel ... (Zweig)

Similarly in newspaper headlines:

40-Tonner zermalmt Trabi – 2 starben (BILD)	<i>Forty-ton lorry squashes Trabi – two dead</i>
---	--

It is also a typical feature of narration in colloquial speech, as in English:

Gestern Abend geh ich ins Café und seh den Horst Brunner dort an der Theke sitzen	<i>Last night I go down the pub and see Horst Brunner sitting there at the bar</i>
---	--

12.2 The past and perfect tenses

What in this book is referred to as the PAST TENSE is sometimes called the IMPERFECT TENSE. However, unlike the imperfect tense of some languages, like French, Spanish or Latin, the **German past tense does not convey the idea of an incomplete or continuous action**. It simply indicates that the action or event took place at some time in the past in exactly the same way as the English past tense. For this reason, the less misleading term ‘past tense’ is to be preferred.

12.2.1 The English and German past and perfect tenses

In **English** there is typically a **clear difference between the past and the perfect tenses**, and the sentences ‘I broke my leg’ and ‘I have broken my leg’ are quite distinct in meaning.

The **English past tense** simply tells us that **something happened in the past**, so that ‘I broke my leg’ tells us that it happened at some time in the past – and it’s

probably mended now.

The **English perfect tense**, on the other hand, usually indicates that what happened in the past still has **some relevance at the present**. When we say ‘I have broken my leg’, for instance, it usually means that it is still broken at the moment of speaking.

The **German** sentences *Ich **brach** mir das Bein* and *Ich **habe** mir das Bein **gebrochen*** look deceptively similar to English. However, the difference in meaning is much less clear-cut than in English, and in many contexts either can be used without any real difference in meaning. Which one is used is often rather a **matter of style or register**.

The main differences between the two German tenses can be summarized as follows:

- The **PERFECT** tense is used principally:
 - to refer to a past action or event which has relevance to the present
 - in spoken German, to refer to past actions and events
- The **PAST** tense is used principally:
 - in written German, to refer to past actions and events

More details are given in the remainder of this section.

12.2.2 Narrating past actions or events

Narrations of past actions and events are typically predominantly in the **PAST** tense in **written German** and in the **PERFECT** tense in **spoken German**.

In English, the past tense is usual in speech or writing to relate an action or event lying entirely in the past. In German, though, while the past tense is usual in such

contexts in the written language, the perfect tends to predominate in everyday speech, especially in South Germany.

The characteristic use of the past tense in a written narrative can be seen in this passage from Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser*:

Den Sommer nach dem Prozess **verbrachte** ich im Lesesaal der Universitätsbibliothek. Ich **kam**, wenn der Lesesaal **öffnete**, und **ging**, wenn er **schloss**. An den Wochenenden **lernte** ich zu Hause. Ich **lernte** so ausschließlich, so besessen, dass die Gefühle und Gedanken, die der Prozess betäubt hatte, betäubt **blieben**. Ich **vermied** Kontakte. Ich **zog** zu Hause aus und **mietete** ein Zimmer. Die wenigen Bekannten, die mich im Lesesaal oder bei gelegentlichen Kinobesuchen **ansprachen**, **stieß** ich zurück.

In Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Chiemgauer Geschichten*, by contrast, where ordinary people (from South Germany) are telling their stories to the author, the narrative is in the perfect tense:

Ja, und dann **hats** wieder ein bisschen **gedauert**, bis sie wieder eine Arbeit **gekriegt hat**, also Lohn von ihr **ist** praktisch nichts **eingegangen**. **Hab** ich alles selbst verdienen **müssen**. Da wo wir dann **geheiratet haben**, da **hab** ich zwei Monate so noch **gearbeitet** auf Montage, und dann **bin** ich gekündigt **worden**.

Nevertheless, there are **important exceptions** to this **general tendency** for the past tense to be used in written narrative and the perfect tense in spoken narrative.

(a) The past tense in spoken German

In South Germany, Austria and Switzerland the past tense is practically never used in everyday speech. However, this is much less true in North Germany (i.e. north of the river Main), where the past tense is quite frequent in everyday speech, especially in the following contexts:

(i) with **commonly used verbs**, i.e.:

- *sein, haben, bleiben, gehen, kommen, stehen* and *es gibt*
- the modal auxiliaries
- verbs of saying, thinking and feeling

In this way, the following would be equally frequent in North German speech:

Ich **war** vorige Woche in Bremen
Sie **konnte** gestern nicht kommen
Was **sagten** Sie?

Ich **bin** vorige Woche in Bremen **gewesen**
Sie **hat** gestern nicht kommen **können**
Was **haben** Sie gesagt ?

The past tense of other verbs can be heard in spoken North German, but, as a general rule, rather less often than the perfect tense.

(ii) with the **passive**, e.g. *Das alte Haus **wurde** abgerissen* or *Das alte Haus **ist** abgerissen **worden***

(iii) in clauses introduced by **als** or **wie**, and in any sentence with the adverb **damals**:

Ich habe sie gesehen, als sie aus der
Straßenbahn **ausstieg**

*I saw her when she got out of
the tram*

Ich habe gehört, wie sie die Treppe
herunterkam

*I heard her coming down the
stairs*

Damals **mussten** alle Russisch lernen

*At that time everybody had to
learn Russian*

(iv) to record a **state**, or a **habitual** or **repeated action** in the past:

Die Rechnung **lag** auf dem Tisch
Bei uns in der alten Heimat
dauerten die Sommerferien länger
als hier

The bill was lying on the table
In our old homeland the summer
holidays used to last longer than they
do here

Ich habe gewusst, dass sein Vater
trank

I knew his father used to drink

(b) A longer narrative oftens starts with a perfect tense, and then continues in the past

The perfect is used to set the scene, as it were. This usage is especially frequent in newspaper reports:

10 Tage nach der Jumbo-Katastrophe in Japan **ist** schon wieder eine Boeing **explodiert**. 54 Urlauber **starben** gestern in einem flammenden Inferno auf dem Flughafen Manchester (England). Als ihr Jet nach Korfu (Griechenland) starten **wollte**, **wurde** das linke Triebwerk krachend zer-fetzt. Sofort **brannte** die Maschine wie eine Riesenfackel. Im Rumpf eingeschlossene Urlauber **trampelten** andere tot. (*BILD*)

(c) The perfect is sometimes used as a narrative tense in written German

The perfect tense is sometimes deliberately used to give a more colloquial tone. However, particularly outside fiction, it is often treated simply as an alternative to the past and seems to be used for reasons which relate to style, emphasis and sentence rhythm, as in the following text from Grzimek's *Serengeti darf nicht sterben*:

Ein tüchtiger Mann namens Rothe, der Verwalter bei den Siedentopfs **war**, **hat** 1913 die Reste einer uralten Siedlung und eines Friedhofs aus der Jungsteinzeit am Nordende des Kraters **entdeckt**. Schon diese Leute, die einige Jahrhunderte vor Christus **gelebt haben**, **weideten** als Hirten ihr Vieh wie heute die Massai. Rothe **hieß** eigentlich anders, er **war** 1905 bei der ersten finnischen Revolution kurze Zeit Minister **gewesen**, ... In Ägypten **stellte** ihm die russische Geheimpolizei nach, und so **kam** er als Tierpfleger mit Maultieren nach Deutsch-Ostafrika.

In practice, the past tense could be substituted for any of the perfect tenses in this passage, or vice versa, without any real difference in meaning.

12.2.3 Past actions or events with continuing relevance in the present

(a) The perfect tense typically indicates a past action with present relevance

The **perfect tense** is usual in both spoken and written German to indicate a **past action or event whose effect is relevant or apparent at the moment of speaking**. Linking the past with the present is also the typical function of the English perfect tense, and in practice the perfect tense is normally used in German in such contexts, i.e.:

(i) where the result of a past action or event is still evident at the moment of speaking:

Sie hat sich das Bein gebrochen (her leg is still in plaster)	<i>She's broken her leg</i>
Es hat in der Nacht geschneit (there's snow on the ground)	<i>It snowed in the night</i>
Meine Tante ist gestern angekommen (and she's still here)	<i>My aunt arrived last night</i>

As the last two examples above show, the perfect tense is used in German to express the present relevance of a past action even if there is a past time adverbial in the sentence. This differs from English, where the past tense is **always** used in sentences which contain adverbials expressing past time.

The use of the perfect tense to express 'present relevance' means that it is particularly frequent with the adverb *schon* 'already', 'yet'. This corresponds to British English usage, but American usage often prefers the past tense in such contexts:

Ich habe sie schon gesehen	{ (BrE): <i>I've already seen her</i> (AmE): <i>I saw her already</i>
Hast du den Arzt schon angerufen ?	{ (BrE): <i>Have you called the doctor yet?</i> (AmE): <i>Did you call the doctor yet?</i>

(ii) to refer to something which happened in the **immediate past**:

Jetzt hat Ballack den Ball eingeworfen	<i>Ballack has just thrown the ball in</i>
Damit haben wir diese kleine Führung beendet	<i>With this we have come to the end of this short guided tour</i>

(iii) to refer to **states** or **repeated actions** which have continued **up to the moment of speaking**:

Ich habe immer gefunden , dass es	<i>I've always found it useful to know</i>
---	--

nützlich ist, viel zu wissen	<i>a lot</i>
Ich habe ihm wiederholt gesagt , dass er ihr schreiben sollte	I've told him repeatedly that he ought to write to her
Das Paket ist noch nicht angekommen	<i>The parcel hasn't arrived yet</i>

The **present** tense is used in German to refer to activities or states which began in the past and continue into the present, where English typically uses a perfect progressive, see 12.1.2.

(b) The past tense used to indicate a past action or event with present relevance

The past tense is occasionally used to indicate a past action or event which has relevance for the present, i.e. in the kind of contexts given under (a) above which are typically the preserve of the perfect. This use of the past tense is mainly restricted to the following contexts, almost exclusively in written German:

(i) in **newspaper headlines** and **short announcements**. In these contexts the past tense, with its single word, can sound neater and snappier:

Lastwagenfahrer gaben Blockade am Brenner nach einer Woche auf (FR)	<i>Lorry drivers have given up their blockade on the Brenner pass after a week</i>
Sie sahen soeben einen Bericht von unserem Korrespondenten in Moskau	<i>You have just been watching a report from our Moscow correspondent</i>

(ii) with **common verbs**, especially the auxiliary verbs, and in the **passive**:

In der letzten Zeit war sie sehr krank	<i>She has been very ill recently</i>
Er musste heute kommen	<i>He has had to come today</i>
Noch nie wurde ein Auto so oft gebaut (VW advert)	<i>No car has ever been produced in such numbers</i>

(iii) in **relative clauses**:

Das sind die ersten Bilder der
Unruhen in Birma, die uns
erreichten

*These are the first pictures which have
reached us of the disturbances in Burma*

In all the above examples the perfect tense would be equally possible.

12.2.4 Other uses of the past tense

The perfect tense cannot be used in any of these contexts.

(a) to relate a continuing state or activity in the past

i.e. a continuing state or activity which began in the past and was still in progress at a more recent point in the past. This is the equivalent in past time of the use of the present with *seit* phrases, etc. (see 12.1.2). In English the pluperfect tense (especially the pluperfect progressive) is used in such contexts:

Ich **wartete** schon zwei Stunden/seit
zwei Stunden auf sie

*I had been waiting for her for two
hours*

Das Schloss **gehörte** seit Jahrhunderten
den Grafen von Solms

*The castle had belonged to the Counts
of Solms for centuries*

As with the use of the perfect tense rather than the present, the pluperfect tense is used rather than the past tense in **negative statements** or when referring to a **series** of actions or states:

Ich **hatte** ihm seit Jahren **zugeredet**, sein
Haus zu verkaufen

*I had been urging him for years to
sell his house*

(b) with the sense of a future-in-the-past

The past tense is an infrequent alternative in such contexts to the *würd e* -form of *Konjunktiv II* (see 14.2.4c):

Nachdem er sicher war, dass der Vorgang nicht mehr hochging (<i>more usual: hochgehen würde</i>), verließ er das Theater	<i>When he was sure that the curtain would not go up again, he left the theatre</i>
--	---

(c) to refer to the present moment

This is a special usage to recall information which has already been given in the past:

Wie war ihr Name doch gleich?	<i>What was your name again?</i>
Wer erhielt das Eisbein?	<i>Who is getting the knuckle of pork?</i>
Herr Ober, ich bekam noch ein Bier	<i>Waiter, I did order another beer</i>

12.2.5 Other uses of the perfect tense

The past tense cannot be used in any of these contexts.

(a) The perfect tense used instead of the future perfect

(i) The perfect tense is often used in the sense of a future perfect:

Bis morgen um diese Zeit habe ich alles geregelt	<i>By this time tomorrow I shall have settled everything</i>
Bald habe ich den Brief geschrieben	<i>I'll have written the letter soon</i>

As with the use of the present tense to refer to future time (see 12.1.3), the perfect tense can only substitute for the future perfect if it is clear from the context (e.g. from a time adverbial) that the reference is to the future. There is no comparable usage in English, where the future perfect tense is always used in such contexts.

When the future perfect tense is used in such sentences in German, e.g. *Bis*

*morgen um diese Zeit **werde** ich alles geregelt **haben***, there is often an additional sense of a prediction or a supposition, see 12.3.2.

(ii) The perfect is usual in subordinate time clauses with future reference, typically introduced by the conjunction **wenn**. In these contexts English and German correspond in the tense used:

Wenn ich von ihm gehört habe , werde ich dir schreiben	<i>When I've heard from him, I shall write to you</i>
--	---

Very occasionally a future perfect is used in such sentences in written German:

Ich will fortgehen, wenn ich genug gelesen haben werde (<i>Andersch</i>)	<i>I intend to leave when I have read enough</i>
---	--

(b) The perfect tense used to indicate a characteristic state

The perfect tense can be used in German to indicate an action whose completion can be taken to define a particular person or thing. This usage is particularly common in technical and legal language and has no equivalent in English.

Ein Unglück ist schnell geschehen	<i>Accidents happen quickly (i.e. if you don't watch out)</i>
Ein Akademiker hat studiert	<i>A graduate is a person who has completed a course of study</i>
Die Mannschaft, die zuerst 50 Punkte erreicht hat , ist Sieger	<i>The first team to reach 50 points is the winner</i>

12.3 The future and future perfect tenses

The conjugation of the **future** and **future perfect** tenses is explained in 10.3.1 and shown in [Table 10.13](#).

The English future has two forms, one with the auxiliaries *will* or *shall* (usually reduced to *'ll* in speech, e.g. *I'll probably see her on Monday*), and one with the phrase *be going to* (e.g. *I'm going to see her on Monday*). The difference in meaning between these is slight, although *be going to* is rather less frequent, more typical of informal registers, and tends to emphasize immediacy or intention more strongly.

12.3.1 The future and future perfect tenses refer to future time

The **future tense** (sometimes called *Futur I* in German) relates an action or event which will happen after the time of speaking:

Ich werde sie nicht mehr sehen	<i>I won't/shan't see her again</i>
Wirst du ihr helfen können ?	<i>Will you/Are you going to be able to help her?</i>

The **future perfect** tense (sometimes called *Futur II* in German) is a 'relative' tense, indicating an action or event which will take place **before** another action or event in the future:

Gewiss wird sie den Brief bis morgen Abend geschrieben haben	<i>She will certainly have written the letter by tomorrow evening</i>
---	---

If the reference to future time is otherwise clear from the context, German often prefers the present tense to the future (see 12.1.3), and the perfect tense to the future perfect (see 12.2.5a). However, there are contexts where these tenses must be used to make the future reference clear:

Ich mag sie nicht und werde sie nie mögen	<i>I don't like her and I'll never like her</i>
Hat er Ihnen nicht gesagt, dass er Sie besuchen wird ?	<i>Didn't he tell you that he's going to visit you?</i>
Am Montag wird sie den Gipfel erreicht haben	<i>On Monday she'll have reached the summit</i>

12.3.2 The future and future perfect tenses expressing a possibility

The future and future perfect tenses are often used to express an intention, a supposition or a possibility, rather than simply a time relationship. In practice this is very similar to the use of the future tenses in English.

Such meanings are obviously predominant in contexts where the future time reference is otherwise clear from the context and the present or perfect tense could be used (see 12.1.3 and 12.2.5a):

Morgen wird es bestimmt schneien	<i>It will definitely snow tomorrow</i>
Ich werde es heute Abend noch erledigen	I am going to finish it tonight
Morgen wird er die Arbeit beendet haben	<i>He'll have finished the work tomorrow</i>

In practice these tenses may not express a notion of futurity at all, with the future expressing a possibility in the present and the future perfect a possibility that something happened in the past.

Sie wird bereits zu Hause sein	<i>She'll be home already</i>
Er ist nicht gekommen. Er wird wieder zu viel zu tun haben	He hasn't come. He'll have too much to do again
Sie wird den Zug verpasst haben	<i>She'll have missed the train</i>
Sie wird sich gestern ein neues Handy gekauft haben	<i>She'll have bought a new mobile/cellphone yesterday</i>

When used in this way to express a possibility, these tenses are often accompanied by the particle **wohl** (see 9.1.34a):

Sie wird **wohl** bereits zu Hause sein Sie wird **wohl** den Zug verpasst haben

This sense of the future and future perfect is very similar to the meaning of **dürfte** (see 15.2.2), so that *Sie wird bereits zu Hause sein* means much the same as *Sie dürfte bereits zu Hause sein*.

12.4 The pluperfect tense

For the forms of the pluperfect tense in German, see 10.3.1 and [Table 10.13](#).

12.4.1 Uses of the pluperfect tense

(a) The pluperfect tense indicates a past within the past

In this way, the pluperfect is a **relative tense** and like the English pluperfect, it places an action or event further back in the past than the time of the context. It is characteristically used in clauses introduced by **nachdem** (see 17.3.4), where the action or event in that clause precedes the action in the main clause:

Nachdem sie gegangen war , fiel ihr ein, was sie vergessen hatte	<i>After she had gone she remembered what she had forgotten</i>
Das bemerkte man erst, nachdem man Platz genommen hatte (Morgner)	<i>You only noticed that after you had sat down</i>

But it is used in many other types of context to indicate a more **remote past**:

Wir warteten, bis der Zug abgefahren war	<i>We waited until the train had left</i>
Sie kamen zu spät, denn das Hochwasser hatte den Damm schon überflutet	<i>They came too late, as the high water had already flooded over the embankment</i>

(b) The perfect tense is occasionally used where one would expect a pluperfect

This may emphasize the immediacy of a state or an action. The effect is rather similar to that of the ‘historic present’, see 12.1.4:

Dann seufzte sie auf eine Weise, die mir deutlich machte, wie alt sie geworden ist (Böll)	<i>Then she sighed in a way which made it clear to me how old she had become</i>
--	--

This usage is quite frequent in writing as well as in everyday speech.

(c) The past tense is sometimes used for an expected pluperfect

This usage is typically literary and is usually motivated by stylistic reasons, with the one-word past tense being preferred in context:

... doch ergab der Befund jene
hoffnungslose Krankheit, die man
vermutete (*Dürrenmatt*)

... *but the investigation revealed the
terminal disease which had been
suspected*

(d) The pluperfect tense is sometimes used simply to refer to the past

In colloquial speech the pluperfect tense is sometimes used simply to refer to the past, where a past or perfect tense would be expected:

Eva **hatte** dich **gesucht**
Wer **war** das **gewesen** ?

*Eva was looking for you
Who was that?*

This ‘pseudopluperfect’, is quite common in everyday speech, but it is not considered standard.

12.4.2 Complex pluperfect tense forms

In colloquial speech in South Germany a **pluperfect** tense can be formed with the **perfect** tense of the auxiliaries *haben* or *sein* so that *Ich **habe** ihn gesehen gehabt*, for example, is heard for standard German *Ich hatte ihn gesehen*.

Forms like this are now widespread in spoken German and no longer restricted to the South. Indeed, if an extra dimension of remoteness in time is needed, the **pluperfect** tense of the auxiliary is sometimes used, e.g. *Sie **hatte** ihn **gesehen** gehabt, bevor er sie bemerkt hatte*. This is very common in spoken German if the

action has been reversed again, e.g.:

Sie **hatte** ihren Schlüssel
vergessen gehabt

*She had forgotten her key (but she's
remembered it again now)*

These complex pluperfects are typical of informal colloquial registers and although they have been present in the language for centuries they are generally regarded as non-standard. However, they are not unknown in writing:

Er dachte: Du kannst jetzt nichts gesehen
haben, du kannst wegdrücken ... und **hast**
bloß den Anschluss **verloren gehabt** und
bist kein Jäger (*Gaiser*)

Wir **haben** uns alle schon daran **gewöhnt**
gehabt, dass nichts geschieht, aber immer
etwas geschehen soll (*Musil*)

*He thought 'You can't have seen
anything now, you can sneak off ...*

*You had just got left behind and
you're not a rifleman'*

*We had all got used to the idea that
nothing was going to happen but
that something always ought to
happen*

12.5 German equivalents for the English progressive tenses

There are no PROGRESSIVE TENSES in German, and the difference between the English **progressive present** tense 'He **is singing** well' (i.e. at the moment) and the **simple present** tense 'He **sings** well' (i.e. usually) cannot be expressed by using different forms of the verb in German. In most contexts the distinction is simply ignored in German and 'Er singt gut' is used for both these English sentences.

Nevertheless, **there are contexts where we need to make it clear in German that we are dealing with a continuous or unfinished action**. For instance, it is clearly essential to be able to distinguish between *The old man drowned* and *The old man was drowning*.

In such contexts, German has a number of possibilities for making it clear that the action was continuous or unfinished, i.e.:

(a) by using an adverb

(i) **eben** or **gerade** are very frequently used to indicate an action in progress:

Ich schreibe eben einen Brief an Anja	<i>I'm writing a letter to Anja</i>
Er liest gerade die Zeitung von Sonntag	<i>He's reading Sunday's newspaper</i>

(ii) **schon** or **gleich** can often be used with verbs of motion:

Ich fahre schon	<i>I'm leaving</i>
Sie kommt gleich	<i>She's coming</i>

(iii) Other adverbials or particles can be used in other contexts:

Ich habe ihn letzthin zweimal in der Woche gesehen	<i>I've been meeting him twice a week (recently)</i>
Regina wohnt zur Zeit in Fulda	<i>Regina is living in Fulda</i>
Ich kümmere mich eben mal darum	<i>I'm seeing to it now</i>

(iv) The sense of **habitual** or **repeated action** which is expressed by a **simple** (i.e. non-progressive) tense in English can be indicated by an adverb in German:

Ich stehe immer um sechs auf	<i>I always get up at six</i>
Sie spielt meistens gut	<i>She (usually) plays well</i>

(b) by using (*gerade/eben*) *dabei sein* followed by an infinitive with zu

Ich bin (<i>gerade</i>) dabei , das Zimmer ein bisschen	<i>I'm just tidying the room up a</i>
--	---------------------------------------

aufzuräumen	<i>bit</i>
Gestern war er gerade dabei , Krieg und Frieden“ zu lesen	<i>He was reading War and Peace yesterday</i>

(c) by using a construction with an infinitival noun

(i) In standard German **beim** is used with an infinitival noun (see 11.4.2b):

Als seine Frau zurückkam, war er beim Kochen	<i>When his wife returned, he was cooking</i>
Wir waren beim Kartenspielen , als er klingelte	<i>We were playing cards when he rang the bell</i>

(ii) Especially in informal registers, **am** is used with an infinitival noun:

Der alte Mann war am Ertrinken	<i>The old man was drowning</i>
Ich bin am Überlegen	<i>I'm thinking (about it)</i>
Wir sind am Arbeiten	<i>We are working</i>
In Köln ist es immer am Regnen	<i>It's always raining in Cologne</i>
Diese Lobby ist ständig am Wachsen (FAZ – <i>Leserbrief</i>)	<i>This lobby is growing all the time</i>

This form was originally characteristic of the Rhineland (see 11.4.2a), but it has recently become much more widely used in spoken German in other areas, not least because it is by far the neatest possibility in contexts like the first example above. However, many authorities still consider it to be non-standard and it is still unusual in writing.

(d) by using a noun with a prepositional phrase

Wir sind an der Arbeit	<i>We're working</i>
Er liest in der Zeitung	<i>He's reading the newspaper</i>
Sie strickte an einem Strumpf	<i>She was knitting a stocking</i>

(e) by using a different verb

Some German verbs, especially those with prefixes, imply the completion of an action. The corresponding unprefixed verbs do not necessarily imply that the action has finished and can in certain contexts correspond more closely to the sense of an English progressive tense:

Sie erkämpften die Freiheit ihres Landes	<i>They fought for their country's freedom</i> (i.e. they were successful)
Sie kämpften für die Freiheit ihres Landes	<i>They were fighting for their country's freedom</i>
Sie erstiegen den Berg	They climbed the mountain
Sie stiegen auf den Berg	<i>They were climbing the mountain</i> (i.e. in the process of climbing, or only part of the way)
Wir haben die Würste aufgegessen	<i>We ate the sausages (up)</i>
Wir haben die Würste gegessen	<i>We were eating the sausages</i>

(f) The perfect progressive

The perfect progressive is typically used to indicate that an action beginning in the past is still going on at the moment of speaking, e.g. *I **have been waiting** here for an hour*. German uses the simple present tense in these contexts, see 12.1.2.

The passive

Table 13.1 Active and passive voice

active voice	Die Schlange frisst den Frosch
passive voice	Der Frosch wird (von der Schlange) gefressen

We typically express actions by using the ACTIVE VOICE, both in English and in German. The active sentence tells us what is happening and who or what is doing it. But we can present a different perspective on an action by using the PASSIVE VOICE, which places the emphasis on what is going on, without necessarily saying who or what is doing it.

Most active sentences with a transitive verb (i.e. a verb which has an accusative object, see 16.3) can be turned into passive sentences. The ACCUSATIVE OBJECT of the sentence in the active voice becomes the SUBJECT of the sentence in the passive voice, as Table 13.1 shows. The subject of the active sentence (the person or thing carrying out the action, called the AGENT) can also appear in a phrase using *von* or *durch* (= English 'by'), but it is often left out altogether. The possibility of talking about an action without saying who or what did it is a major reason to use the passive rather than the active.

There are **two passive forms in German**, using the auxiliary verbs ***werden*** or ***sein*** together with the **past participle**:

- The ***werden*** -passive (e.g. *die Stadt wurde zerstört*) expresses a process and is closely related to the corresponding active voice. In German it is called the ***Vorgangspassiv***.

- The ***sein*** -passive (e.g. *die Stadt war zerstört*) expresses a state. Its use is more restricted than that of the *werden* -passive. In German it is called the ***Zustandspassiv***.

The use of these passives, and other German constructions which are the equivalent of passives, is explained in the following sections of this chapter. These cover:

- The ***werden*** -passive (section 13.1)
- The ***sein***- passive, and the differences between it and the *werden*- passive (section 13.2)
- The use of ***von*** and ***durch*** for English ‘by’ with the passive (section 13.3)
- Other German constructions with **passive meaning** (section 13.4)

Some textbooks of German for English learners suggest that the passive is not used very often in German and its use should be avoided where possible. This is quite misleading. The passive is used frequently in German, particularly in formal writing (especially in technical registers and journalism), but it is by no means unusual in spoken registers.

However, it does tend to be used rather less than in English. One reason for this is that a passive is often used in English to move something other than the subject to the beginning of a sentence, in order to focus on it. In German, with its more flexible word order, this emphasis can be achieved simply by shifting the elements in the sentence round. Thus, the following sentences represent natural equivalents in the two languages:

**Diesen Roman hat Thomas Mann während
eines Aufenthaltes in Italien geschrieben**

*This novel was written by
Thomas Mann during a stay in
Italy*

In German, with its more flexible word order, the accusative object can be placed before the verb and the subject after it, in order to change the focus of the sentence, and there is no need to use a passive construction, as in English. More details on this are given in 19.2.3b.

13.1 The *werden*-passive

Table 13.2 Active and passive sentences

Tense	Active	Passive
Present Past Perfect Future	Der Arzt heilt den Patienten <i>The doctor heals the patient</i>	Der Patient wird (vom Arzt) geheilt <i>The patient is healed (by the doctor)</i>
	Die Bauleute rissen das Haus ab <i>The builders pulled down the house</i>	Das Haus wurde (von den Bauleuten) abgerissen <i>The house was pulled down (by the builders)</i>
	Die Firma hat den Angestellten entlassen <i>The company has sacked the employee</i>	Der Angestellte ist (von der Firma) entlassen worden <i>The employee has been sacked (by the company)</i>
	Der Computer wird das Buch verdrängen <i>The computer will replace the book</i>	Das Buch wird (vom Computer) verdrängt werden <i>The book will be replaced (by the computer)</i>

13.1.1 The *werden*-passive: tenses and moods

The *werden* -passive has the **same range of tenses and moods** as the active voice, and [Table 13.1](#) shows the relationship between the tenses of the active and passive voice in the indicative mood. The full conjugation of these tenses is shown in [Table 10.14](#). For passive forms in the subjunctive mood, see section 10.5.

(a) The use of the passive tenses is in general the same as in the active

(see [Chapter 12](#)). There is some slight variation in use in a few instances:

(i) The **future tense** is little used in the passive, and the present tense is preferred unless there is a risk of being misunderstood (see 12.3). Thus, in the sentence

Das Buch wird im nächsten Semester diskutiert werden	<i>The book will be discussed next semester</i>
---	---

normal usage will prefer the present tense *Das Buch **wird** nächste Woche **diskutiert*** rather than the future, and this is possible because the phrase *nächste Woche* makes the time reference clear. However, in the sentence

Das Haus wird abgerissen werden	<i>The house will be pulled down</i>
--	--------------------------------------

we cannot replace the future tense by the present without changing the meaning. *Das Haus **wird abgerissen*** can only mean ‘The house is being pulled down’.

(ii) The **past tense** of the passive is quite common in both written and spoken German, even in contexts where the perfect tense might be expected in the active voice (see 12.2.3b).

(b) The imperative of the *werden*-passive is rarely used

In practice, only the *sein* -passive is used for **commands** in the passive, e.g. *Sei begrüßt! Sei beruhigt!* (see 14.1.1).

13.1.2 The *werden*-passive can be formed from most transitive verbs

i.e. those verbs which are used with a **direct object** in the **accusative case**, see 16.3.

(a) The direct object becomes the subject of the corresponding

passive construction

The accusative object of the active verb becomes the subject of the corresponding passive construction:

Mein Vater liest diesen Roman	Dieser Roman wird von meinem Vater gelesen
<i>My father is reading this novel</i>	<i>This novel is being read by my father</i>

Further examples are given in [Table 13.2](#).

(b) A few transitive verbs cannot be used in the *werden*-passive

This group consists of a number of verbs of knowing, containing, possessing and receiving, in particular *bedeuten*, *bekommen*, *besitzen*, *enthalten*, *erhalten*, *haben*, *kennen*, *kriegen*, *umfassen* and *wissen*.

These verbs cannot be used in the passive in German, although some of their usual English equivalents can. In German other constructions are used for verbs like this, in particular **active forms** of another verb or a construction with *man*:

Dieses Schloss gehört dem Grafen von Libowitz (i.e. <i>not</i> * <i>wird</i> ... <i>besessen</i>)	<i>This palace is owned by</i> <i>Count von Libowitz</i>
Ihr Brief traf gestern ein (i.e. <i>not</i> * <i>wurde</i> ... <i>erhalten</i>)	<i>Your letter was received</i> <i>yesterday</i>
Man wusste nicht, wie viele Kinder kommen würden (i.e. <i>not</i> * <i>es wurde</i> ... <i>gewusst</i>)	<i>It was not known how many</i> <i>children would come</i>

enthalten can be used with *sein*, e.g. *Wieviel Essig ist in diesem Gefäß enthalten?* but this is not really a passive construction. A passive of *erhalten* can be formed with *bleiben*, see 13.2.2b.

(c) No passive can be formed with the verbs of perception followed by a bare infinitive

(see 11.3.1b). These verbs can be used in the passive with an ‘ing’-form in English, but equivalent sentences in German have other constructions, usually with the active voice:

Man hörte ihn singen	<i>He was heard singing</i>
Ein Vorbeigehender sah ihn in das Haus einbrechen	<i>He was seen breaking into the house by a passer-by</i>

13.1.3 Dative, genitive or prepositional objects and the passive

In German only the accusative (direct) object of a transitive verb can become the subject of a passive construction.

This is quite different to English and means that **the dative object, the genitive object or the prepositional object of a verb can never become the subject of a passive construction in German.**

(a) Verbs with dative objects

If a verb which takes a dative object is used in the passive, **the dative object remains in the dative case.** This applies to all those verbs which govern the dative case, and have no accusative object (see 16.4).

Astrid dankte ihm für seine Hilfe	<i>Astrid thanked him for his help</i>	Ihm wurde für seine Hilfe gedankt	<i>He was thanked for his help</i>
--	--	--	------------------------------------

As the dative object remains in the dative, the verbs in these passive constructions are **subject-less (or impersonal)** and the verb always has **the endings of the third person singular.** Further examples:

Die Polizei kann ihnen helfen	<i>The police can help them</i>	Ihnen kann geholfen werden	<i>They can be helped</i>
Er empfahl uns , eine Kur zu nehmen	<i>He recommended me to take a course</i>	Uns wurde empfohlen, eine Kur zu nehmen	<i>We were recommended to take a</i>

of treatment at a spa

course of treatment at a spa

The dative object does not need to be in first position, before the verb, but if it is placed later in the sentence (with a slight change in emphasis) the pronoun *es* (see 3.6.2a) has to be used in first position. Compare the following (equally acceptable) alternatives to the examples above:

Es kann ihnen geholfen werden Es wurde uns empfohlen, eine Kur zu nehmen

(b) Verbs with an accusative and a dative object

With verbs which have both an accusative object and a dative object (so-called *einem etwas* verbs, see 16.4.1), the **dative object remains in the dative in the passive**. This is because, in German, **only an accusative object can become the subject of a passive verb**.

This differs from English, where, with many verbs which have two objects, either can become the subject of the passive. An English sentence like ***He gave the old man the money*** can be converted into the passive in two ways, with the direct object *the money* or the indirect object *the old man* as the subject. Compare the following sentences and their German equivalents:

<i>The money</i> (direct object) <i>was given to the old man</i>	Das Geld wurde dem alten Mann gegeben
<i>The old man</i> (indirect object) <i>was given the money</i>	Dem alten Mann wurde das Geld gegeben

The direct object *das Geld* of the German sentence *Er gab dem alten Mann das Geld* can be the subject of the passive sentence in German, as in English, but not the indirect (dative) object *dem alten Mann*, which must remain in the dative case in German.

The original direct object *das Geld* becomes the subject of both the German passive sentences, and this makes for an even more striking difference between the languages if the indirect object is in the plural, since the verb must still agree

with the singular subject *das Geld*. Compare:

The money (direct object) was given to <i>the old men</i>	Das Geld wurde den alten Männern gegeben
The old men (indirect object) were given <i>the money</i>	Den alten Männern wurde das Geld gegeben

A dative object can become the subject of a passive construction with *bekommen* or *kriegen*, see 13.4.2.

(c) German equivalents for English sentences with a passive infinitive

Sentences like ‘He could not hope to be helped’ are quite usual in English, but in German **the passive infinitive of a verb which governs the dative cannot be used in an infinitive clause with *zu***. We cannot say * *Er konnte nicht hoffen geholfen zu werden*, since *helfen* governs a dative and its object cannot be used as the subject of a passive construction. A *dass* -clause has to be used in the equivalent sentences in German:

Er konnte nicht hoffen, dass ihm geholfen wurde	<i>He could not hope to be helped</i>
Er besteht darauf, dass ihm geantwortet wird	<i>He insists on being answered</i>

(d) Verbs with genitive or prepositional objects

Like dative objects, **genitive objects and prepositional objects** (see 16.5 and 16.7) **cannot become the subject of corresponding passive constructions**. They remain in the same form in an impersonal construction, with the verb in the third person singular form:

Sie gedachten der Toten <i>They remembered</i> <i>the dead</i>	Der Toten wurde gedacht <i>The dead</i> <i>were remembered</i>
Meine Mutter sorgt für die Kinder <i>My</i>	Für die Kinder wird gesorgt <i>The</i>

mother is taking care of the children

children are being taken care of

With these verbs, too, the genitive or the prepositional phrase can be placed later in the sentence rather than at the beginning, but, similarly, *es* then has to be inserted before the verb:

Es wurde der Toten gedacht

Es wird für die Kinder gesorgt

13.1.4 The 'subjectless' or impersonal *werden*-passive

(a) The *werden*-passive can be used without a subject to denote an activity in general

A sentence like *Es wird getanzt* simply means 'There is dancing going on' without any indication of who is doing it. No comparable construction exists in English. The verb has the third person singular endings:

Sie hörten, wie im Nebenzimmer **geredet wurde**

They heard people talking in the next room

Hier darf nicht **geraucht werden**

Smoking is not allowed here

Vor Hunden **wird gewarnt**

Beware of dogs

Heute ist mit den Bauarbeiten **begonnen worden (ARD)**

They started construction today

(b) A subjectless passive can be formed from any verb which expresses a continuous activity

This construction can be used not only with transitive verbs, but also with other verbs which cannot otherwise be used in the passive, i.e. **intransitive verbs** and, in colloquial German, reflexive verbs:

Im Flugzeug darf ab Herbst

From the autumn it will be permitted to use the

gesurft und gesimst werden	<i>internet and send text messages in aeroplanes</i>
An dem Abend wurde viel	There was a lot of singing that evening
gesungen	<i>It's time to get washed</i>
Jetzt wird sich gewaschen	

(c) The use of *es* in impersonal passive constructions

In these impersonal passive constructions, the pronoun *es* is inserted in a main clause if there is no other word or phrase before the verb (see 3.6.2a for further details):

Es wurde auf den Straßen getanzt	<i>There was dancing in the streets</i>
Es wird besonders rücksichtslos geparkt (ARD)	<i>People are parking in a particularly inconsiderate way</i>

(d) The subjectless passive can be used to give commands

(see 14.1.3c for further details):

Jetzt wird gearbeitet!	<i>Let's get down to work now</i>
Jetzt wird nicht gelacht!	<i>No laughing now!</i>

13.2 The *sein*-passive

13.2.1 Forms of the *sein*-passive

The conjugation of verbs in the indicative mood of the *sein* -passive is given in [Table 10.15](#). Subjunctive forms are explained in section 10.5. In practice, only a limited range of tenses and moods of the *sein* -passive is in use:

[Table 13.3](#) Forms of the *sein* -passive

Present tense	Ich bin beruhigt
Imperative	Sei beruhigt!
Past tense	Ich war beruhigt
Konjunktiv I	Ich sei beruhigt
Konjunktiv II	Ich wäre beruhigt

The past tense tends to be used rather than the perfect tense, although the perfect tense is sometimes heard in spoken German and is occasionally found in writing:

Vierzig Lehrer sind gestern als krank gemeldet gewesen (Zeit)	<i>Forty teachers were reported sick yesterday</i>
---	--

The future tense, e.g. *Die Bilder **werden** morgen entwickelt **sein*** is very seldom used.

The existence of two distinct passive forms in German, and the fact that the less frequently used of them looks like the English passive with *be*, means that English learners need to pay particular attention to the distinction between the two.

As with the *werden* -passive, see 13.1.3, only the accusative object of a transitive verb can become the subject of a *sein* -passive. With verbs governing a dative, genitive or prepositional object, a 'subjectless' construction must also be used in the *sein* -passive:

Damit ist den Kranken nicht geholfen	<i>The patients have not been helped by that</i>
Für die Verletzten ist gesorgt	<i>The wounded have been taken care of</i>

In practice, relatively few intransitive verbs are used in the *sein* -passive. The most frequent are *dienen*, *helfen*, *nützen*, *schaden*, *sorgen für*.

13.2.2 The *sein*-passive and the *werden*-passive

(a) The *sein*-passive refers to a state, whilst the *werden*-passive

refers to an action

This is reflected in its German name: ***Zustandspassiv***. It is used to describe a **state** which the subject of the verb is in as the result of a previous action. The *werden* -passive, on the other hand, relates an **action** or **process**, hence its German name: ***Vorgangspassiv***.

The following sentence illustrates the difference between the two passives:

Als ich um fünf kam, war die Tür geschlossen , aber ich weiß nicht, wann sie geschlossen wurde	<i>When I came at five the door was shut, but I don't know when it was shut</i>
---	---

In the first clause, someone had **already shut** the door by the time I arrived, i.e. it was in a **state** of being shut, and for this reason the *sein* -passive is used. In the last case I am referring to the time when the **action** of shutting the door occurred, and the *werden* -passive is used.

The *werden* -passive is more frequent than the *sein* -passive and it can be used with more verbs. Nevertheless, the *sein* -passive can be quite common in some registers, e.g. in newspaper reports, which often have reason to refer to states or to the results of actions, and also in narrative fiction:

Deutschland **ist** fest in die NATO **eingebunden** (*Welt*)

Dass die Wahlergebnisse in der DDR **gefälscht waren**, bestreitet auch Modrow nicht (*Spiegel*)

The following examples show the distinct meanings of the two passives:

	<i>The table is being laid</i> (i.e. someone is performing the action of laying the table)
Der Tisch wird gedeckt	<i>The table is laid</i> (i.e. someone has already laid it)
Der Tisch ist gedeckt	<i>The town was destroyed in 1993</i> (i.e. the action took place in 1993)
Die Stadt wurde 1993 zerstört	<i>The town was destroyed</i> (i.e. someone had already destroyed it)
Die Stadt war zerstört	<i>The town hall was (being) gradually surrounded by</i>
Das Rathaus wurde allmählich von	

Demonstranten umringt	<i>demonstrators</i> (i.e. the demonstrators were in the
Das Rathaus war von	process of surrounding it)
Demonstranten umringt	<i>The town hall was surrounded by demonstrators</i> (i.e. the demonstrators were already all round the town hall)

(b) Indicators pointing to the use of the *werden*-passive or the *sein*-passive

In practice, there are a number of indicators which can prove helpful in determining whether to use the *sein* -passive or the *werden* -passive:

- (i) The *werden* -passive often corresponds to an English progressive tense, while this is never the case with the *sein* -passive. This is especially the case in the present tense.

Die Straße wird repariert	<i>The road is being repaired</i>
Der Tisch wird gedeckt	The table is being laid
Die Stadt wurde in diesem Augenblick zerstört	<i>The city was being destroyed at that precise moment</i>

- (ii) As the *sein* -passive relates the state resulting from a previous action, its meaning is close to that of the perfect tense, since the perfect tense often expresses a result (see 12.2.3). This means, for example, that the following pairs of sentences are very close in meaning:

Das Haus ist gebaut	Das Haus ist gebaut worden
Die Stadt war zerstört	Die Stadt war zerstört worden

As a consequence, the natural English equivalent of a German *sein* -passive is often a perfect or pluperfect tense rather than a present or a past tense:

Der Wagen ist repariert	<i>The car has been repaired</i>
Rund 2500 Polizeibeamte riegelten die Stadt ab, über die ein umfassendes	<i>About 2500 police officers cordoned off the city, which had been made subject to</i>

Demonstrationsverbot **verhängt war** *a comprehensive ban on demonstrations*
(Welt)

(iii) In the *sein* -passive, the past participle is essentially descriptive and is being used with the force of an adjective describing the state of the subject of the verb. For example, *geöffnet* in the sentence **Die Tür ist geöffnet** has much the same function as *offen* in **Die Tür ist offen**. Compare also:

Der Brief **ist geschrieben**
Die Stadt **war zerstört**

Der Brief ist fertig
Die Stadt war kaputt

The past participles of many reflexive verbs (which cannot form a passive) can similarly be used with *sein* with the force of an adjective:

Das Mädchen **ist verliebt** (compare: *Das Mädchen hat sich verliebt*)
Ich **bin erholt** (compare: *Ich habe mich erholt*)

The past participle can be used in a similar way with the verbs **bleiben** and **scheinen**:

Das Museum bleibt geschlossen	<i>The museum remains closed</i>
Der Wagen schien leicht beschädigt	<i>The car seemed slightly damaged</i>
Nur Bruchstücke dieser Skulptur sind erhalten geblieben	<i>Only fragments of this sculpture have been preserved</i>

(iv) As the *sein* -passive expresses a state resulting from a previous action, it **can only be used with verbs whose action produces a clear result**, e.g. *bauen, begraben, beunruhigen, brechen, öffne n, reparieren, schreiben, verletzen, waschen, zerstöre n*, etc.:

Meine Hand ist verletzt	<i>My hand is injured</i> (and you can see the resulting injury)
Mein Wagen ist beschädigt	<i>My car is damaged</i> (and you can see the resulting damage)

By contrast, verbs whose action produces no tangible or visible result, like

bewundern or *zeigen*, cannot be used in the *sein* -passive at all, as admiring or showing do not involve any kind of result. Other verbs which are typically not used in the *sein* -passive include:

anbieten	<i>offer</i>	brauchen	<i>need</i>
begegnen	meet	erinnern	remind
bemerkten	notice	loben	praise
betrachten	<i>look at</i>	sehen	<i>see</i>

(c) The *sein*-passive can indicate a continuous state

Diese Insel ist von Kannibalen bewohnt	<i>The island is inhabited by cannibals</i>
Die Oberrheinebene ist durch ihre Randgebirge vor rauen Winden geschützt (<i>Brinkmann</i>)	The Upper Rhine plain is protected from harsh winds by the hills which fringe it
Die Häuser sind nur durch einen Drahtzaun von der Müllverbrennungsanlage getrennt	The houses are only separated from the incinerating plant by a wire fence
Das Esszimmer ist von einem großen Kronleuchter beleuchtet	The dining-room is lit by a large chandelier
Die Bücher in der alten Bibliothek sind mit Staub bedeckt	<i>The books in the old library are covered with dust</i>

Here we are not dealing with the result of a process, but with a lasting state, often a permanent one. In such sentences, the *werden*- passive and the *sein*- passive are interchangeable as long as the *werden* -passive cannot be interpreted as referring to an action. Thus, the following are equally acceptable alternatives to the first four examples above:

Diese Insel **wird** von Kannibalen bewohnt

Die Oberrheinebene **wird** durch ihre Randgebirge vor rauen Winde geschützt

Die Häuser **werden** nur durch einen Drahtzaun von der Müllverbrennungsanlage getrennt

Das Esszimmer **wird** von einem großen Kronleuchter beleuchtet

But *not* *Die Bücher in der alten Bibliothek werden mit Staub bedeckt*, as this

would mean someone is actively engaged in covering them with dust.

(d) The *sein*-passive and the *werden*-passive with *geboren*

Current usage with this verb is as follows:

- (i) ***Ich bin geboren*** is used when no other circumstances or only the place of birth are mentioned:

Wann sind Sie **geboren** ? Ich **bin** in Hamburg **geboren**

- (ii) ***Ich wurde geboren*** is used if further circumstances, or the date, are mentioned:

Ich **wurde** im Jahre 1985 in Hamburg **geboren** Als ich **geboren wurde**, schneite es

- (iii) Referring to people who are dead, either passive can be used:

Goethe **wurde/war** im Jahre 1749 in Frankfurt **geboren**

13.3 *von*, *durch* and *mit* with the passive

An important reason to use the passive rather than the active is to avoid mentioning who is performing the action, and this is the case with 90% of passive sentences in German. However, if required, the person or thing carrying out the action can be included in a passive construction by adding a prepositional phrase introduced by ***von*** or ***durch***, which correspond to English *by*, and ***mit*** is also often used with passives.

The traditional rule of thumb is that ***von*** is used with persons, ***durch*** with things. This is a useful guideline, but it is not fully reliable.

Phrases with *von* or *durch* occur most often with the *werden* -passive. With the *sein* -passive they occur mainly when it is a matter of a continuing state, as in 13.2.2c.

(a) *von* indicates the agent who actually carries out the action

This is usually a person, but can be a force of nature:

Ich war von meinem Onkel gewarnt worden	<i>I had been warned by my uncle</i>
Sie wurde von zwei Polizeibeamten verhaftet	<i>She was arrested by two police officers</i>
Die Stadt wurde von einem großen Waldbrand bedroht	<i>The city was threatened by a huge forest fire</i>

(b) *durch* indicates the means by which the action is carried out

This is most often a thing which is the involuntary cause of the occurrence, but it can be a person acting as an intermediary. Thus, we would say *Ich wurde **durch einen Boten** benachrichtigt* ‘I was informed by a messenger’, not *von einem Boten*, because the messenger was bringing a message from someone else.

Die Ernte wurde durch den Hagel vernichtet	<i>The crop was destroyed by hail</i>
Ich wurde durch den starken Verkehr aufgehalten	<i>I was held up by the heavy traffic</i>
Die Hühnerpest wird durch ein mikroskopisch nicht nachweisbares Virus verursacht (ND)	<i>Fowl pest is caused by a virus which is not detectable under the microscope</i>

(c) The distinction between *von* and *durch* is not always upheld

In practice there can be considerable hesitation between *von* and *durch*, as it is often not wholly clear whether we are dealing with the ‘agent’ or the ‘means’. *von* is always usual for persons who obviously carried out the action themselves. However, when this could be a matter of interpretation, or with ‘things’ (especially natural forces like storms and earthquakes) which people might think of as actually carrying out an action, either *von* or *durch* can be acceptable, as in

the following sentences:

Sie ist von den Demonstranten/durch die Demonstranten aufgehalten worden	<i>She was held up by the demonstrators</i>
Der Baum ist von dem Blitz/durch den Blitz getroffen worden	<i>The tree has been struck by lightning</i>

In the first sentence *von den Demonstranten* could imply that the demonstrators held her up deliberately, whereas *durch die Demonstranten* could mean that it just happened to be the case that she was held up by them. However, such fine distinctions are often ignored in practice.

(d) *von* and *durch* in the same sentence

In practice, the difference between *von* and *durch* is most clear when both are used in the same sentence:

Ich war von meinem Onkel durch seinen Sohn gewarnt worden	<i>I had been warned by my uncle through his son</i> (My uncle is doing the warning, his son is the intermediary)
Das Gebäude wurde von Terroristen durch einen Sprengstoffanschlag zerstört	<i>The building was destroyed by terrorists in a bomb attack</i> (Terrorists destroyed it, the bombs were the means)

(e) A phrase with *mit* can be used to indicate the instrument used to perform an action

Das Schloss musste mit einem Hammer geöffnet werden	<i>The lock had to be opened with a hammer</i>
Dieser Brief ist mit der Hand geschrieben	<i>This letter was written by hand</i>

13.4 Other passive constructions

German has a wide range of other ways of expressing passive ideas, or constructions which are used where English typically uses a passive.

13.4.1 *man*

man is often used in German where English naturally uses a passive (see also 5.5.18):

Man sagt, dass ...	<i>It is said that ...</i>
Man hatte ihn davor gewarnt	<i>He had been warned about it</i>
Das macht man nicht	<i>That's not done</i>

13.4.2 Passive constructions with *bekommen* and *kriegen*

(a) The use of *bekommen* and *kriegen* in passive constructions

As explained in 13.1.3a, a dative object cannot be turned into the subject of the *werden* -passive. However, if *bekommen* or *kriegen* (or, much less frequently, *erhalten*) is used with the past participle, the dative object of that verb can be made the subject of the sentence:

Ich schenke meinem Bruder das Buch	Mein Bruder kriegt/bekommt das Buch (von mir)
Ich widerspreche meinem Bruder	→ Mein Bruder kriegt/bekommt (von mir) widersprochen

This construction is chiefly found in speech (especially with *kriegen*), and not all Germans accept it as correct in writing, although it has become very frequent. It is used in particular with verbs which express an action and where the original dative object can be interpreted in some way as receiving something.

(b) The *bekommen/kriegen*-passive can be formed from various types of dative object

Specifically:

(i) from the **dative object of *einem etwas* verbs**, i.e. a verb which governs both a dative and an accusative object (see 16.4.1). In practice the *bekommen* / *kriegen* passive occurs most frequently with this type of verb, and these constructions are now generally accepted. The English equivalent may be a passive, or a construction with 'have' or 'get' with a past participle. Active sentences like

Man zahlt **mir** das Geld regelmäßig aus
Somebody pays me the money regularly

Man hat **uns** viel gezeigt
Somebody showed us a lot

can be rephrased with the *bekommen/kriegen* -passive as:

Ich **bekomme/kriege** das Geld regelmäßig **ausgezahlt**
*I am paid the money regularly/ I have/get the money
paid to me regularly*

Wir haben viel
gezeigt
bekommen/gekriegt
*We were shown a
lot/ We had a lot
shown to us*

This construction is possible with most verbs which have an accusative and a dative object, with the notable exception of *geben*.

(ii) from the **dative object** of verbs which only govern a dative object (see 16.4.2). The use of the *bekommen/kriegen* passive with these verbs is common in colloquial speech, but not (yet) widely accepted in writing:

Sie **bekam** gratuliert
Vera **bekommt** von dir geholfen
Er **bekam** von niemandem widersprochen

She was congratulated
Vera is being helped by you
He was contradicted by nobody

This construction is not possible with verbs which do not denote an activity or whose dative object cannot be interpreted as a recipient, e.g. *ähneln*, *begegnen*, *gefallen*, *gehören* or *schaden*.

(iii) from the dative of advantage or the dative of possession (see 2.5.2 and 2.5.3). This often corresponds to an English construction with ‘get’. As in the previous case, this use of the *bekommen/ kriegen* passive with these verbs is colloquial and not widely accepted in writing:

Sie **kriegte** den Wagen **repariert**
 Man **bekommt** den Schlips **abgeschnitten**
 (Grzimek)

Er **bekam** von mir die Wohnung **renoviert**
 Das Haus **bekam** einen Balkon **angebaut**

She got her car repaired
You get your tie cut off
He got his flat renovated by
me
The house got a balcony
built on

(c) Some subjects of a construction with *kriegen/bekommen* do not come from a dative

(i) The construction with *kriegen* or *bekommen* is sometimes used with verbs which take two accusatives, e.g. *lehren* ‘teach’ and *schimpfen* ‘tell off’, ‘bawl out’ (see 16.3.3). The conditions are the same as for other uses of the construction, i.e. that the verb denotes an action and the subject of the *kriegen/bekommen* construction is a recipient. This usage is strictly colloquial:

Er **bekommt** (von mir) **geschimpft**
 Der Junge **bekommt** die Vokabeln
gelehrt

He’s getting told off (by me)
The boy is getting the words taught
him

(ii) It is used in some other contexts as the equivalent to an English construction with ‘get’:

Ich **kriege** den Brief bis heute Abend
geschrieben

I’ll get the letter written by
tonight

13.4.3 Reflexive verbs

Reflexive verbs (see 16.3.5) are a frequent alternative to a passive construction, and verbs which denote accomplishments or activities can be used with *sich* to give the sense of a passive, e.g. *Das erklärt sich leicht* ‘That is easily explained’. A sense of ability (= *können*) is sometimes implied.

(a) Reflexive constructions from transitive verbs

In most instances an adverbial of manner is needed to complete the sense:

Das lernt sich rasch	<i>That is/can be quickly learned</i>
Das Buch verkaufte sich in Rekordauflagen	The book was sold in record numbers
Mein Verdacht hat sich bestätigt	<i>My suspicions have been confirmed</i>

(b) Reflexive constructions from intransitive verbs

Reflexive constructions from intransitive verbs are impersonal. An adverbial of manner **and** an adverbial of place or time are usually needed to complete the sense:

Es fährt sich gut auf der Autobahn	<i>You can drive well on the motorway</i>
In der Hauptstadt lebt es sich besser als anderswo (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>You can live better in the capital than anywhere else</i>

(c) Other reflexive verbs

A reflexive verb is the closest German equivalent to many English passives or constructions which look like passives:

sich ärgern	<i>be annoyed</i>	sich schämen	<i>be ashamed</i>
sich freuen	<i>be pleased</i>	sich verbinden	<i>be associated</i>

13.4.4 Phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are made up from a **verbal noun** (especially in - *ung*) and a **verb** which no longer has its full meaning. Many **phrasal verbs have the sense of a passive**, especially those which include *erfahren*, *erhalten*, *finden*, *gehen*, *gelangen*, *kommen* or *stehen*:

eine große Vereinfachung erfahren (= sehr vereinfacht werden)	<i>be greatly simplified</i>
seine Vollendung finden (= vollendet werden)	be completed
in Vergessenheit geraten (= vergessen werden)	be forgotten
zur Anwendung kommen (= angewendet werden)	be used
Unsere Arbeit hat Anerkennung gefunden	Our work was appreciated
Der Wunsch ging in Erfüllung	The wish was fulfilled
Das Stück gelangte/kam zur Aufführung	The play was performed
Diese Frage steht zur Diskussion	<i>This question is being discussed</i>

Phrasal verbs like these are very characteristic of modern written non-literary German. They have been criticized by stylists as verbose, but they make it possible to express nuances lacking in the simple verb.

For example, *Das Stück gelangte zur Aufführung* emphasizes the start of the action, whilst *Das Stück wurde aufgeführt* simply records that the action took place.

13.4.5 *zu* + infinitive

The **infinitive with *zu*** with some **auxiliary** and **semi-auxiliary verbs** has the force of a passive. This has been called the ‘modal infinitive’ construction, and further details are given in 11.2.4.

Depending on the verb, these constructions can express possibility, obligation or necessity, i.e. have the sense of *können*, *müssen* or *sollen* followed by a passive infinitive. The following verbs occur in this construction:

(a) *sein*: the construction has the sense of *können*, *müssen* or *sollen*

The English construction with 'be to' has a very similar meaning:

Die Anträge sind im Rathaus abzuholen (= Die Anträge können/müssen im Rathaus abgeholt werden)	<i>The applications may/can/must be collected from the town hall/are to be collected from the town hall</i>
Diese Frage ist noch zu erörtern (= Diese Frage muss/soll noch erörtert werden)	<i>This question must still be discussed/is still to be discussed</i>
Dieser Text ist bis morgen zu übersetzen (= Dieser Text muss/soll bis morgen übersetzt werden)	<i>This text must be translated by tomorrow/This text is to be translated by tomorrow</i>

This construction can be turned into an extended adjective using a present participle, e.g. *diese noch zu erörternde Frage* (see 11.5.1e).

(b) *bleiben*: the construction has the sense of *müssen*

Vieles bleibt noch zu erledigen (= Vieles muss noch erledigt werden)	<i>Much still remains to be done</i>
---	--

(c) *gehen*: the construction has the sense of *können*

Das Bild geht nicht zu befestigen (= Das Bild kann nicht befestigt werden)	<i>The picture cannot be secured</i>
---	--

This construction is colloquial and not accepted as standard.

(d) *stehen*: the construction has the sense of *müssen*

It is only used impersonally, with a limited number of verbs, principally

befürchten and *erwarten*:

Es steht zu befürchten , dass sich diese Vorfälle häufen (= Es muss befürchtet werden, dass sich diese Vorfälle häufen)	<i>It is to be feared that these incidents will occur increasingly</i>
--	--

(e) *es gibt*: the construction has the sense of *müssen*

Es gibt noch vieles zu tun (= Vieles muss noch getan werden)	<i>There's still a lot to be done</i>
--	---------------------------------------

13.4.6 *sich lassen*

sich lassen with a following infinitive can have the force of a passive. It expresses possibility and thus means much the same as using *können* with a passive infinitive. This construction is very frequent with transitive verbs in all registers:

Das lässt sich aber erklären (= Das kann aber erklärt werden)	<i>But that can be explained</i>
Das Problem lässt sich leicht lösen (= Das Problem kann leicht gelöst werden)	<i>The problem can be solved easily</i>
Das ließe sich aber ändern (= Das könnte geändert werden)	<i>That might be altered, though</i>
Ein Ende lässt sich nicht absehen	<i>There is no end in sight</i>

This construction can be used impersonally with transitive or intransitive verbs. The impersonal subject *es* can be omitted if it is not in initial position in a main clause, see 3.6.2:

Es lässt sich dort gut leben	<i>It's a good life there</i>
Darüber lässt (es) sich streiten	<i>We can argue about that</i>

In general, this construction is only possible if the subject is a thing rather than a

person. Reflexive *lassen* with a person as subject usually has the sense of ‘cause’ or ‘permit’, see 11.3.1c.

13.4.7 *gehören*

***gehören* with a past participle has passive force** and the sense of obligation or necessity. This construction is mainly found in spoken South German:

Dieser Kerl gehört eingesperrt (= Dieser Kerl sollte eingesperrt werden)	<i>That guy needs locking up</i>
Dem gehört das deutlich gesagt (= Ihm sollte das deutlich gesagt werden)	<i>He ought to be told that clearly</i>

13.4.8 Adjectives in *-bar*

Adjectives in *-bar* from verbs can be used with *sein* to express a possibility with a passive sense. They correspond to English adjectives in ‘-able’/‘-ible’, see 20.3.1a:

Diese Muscheln sind nicht essbar (= Diese Muscheln können nicht gegessen werden)	<i>These shellfish are not edible/cannot be eaten</i>
Das Argument ist nicht widerlegbar (= Das Argument kann nicht widerlegt werden)	<i>The argument is irrefutable/cannot be refuted</i>
Man ist einfach unerreichbar (<i>Frisch</i>)	<i>One simply cannot be reached</i>

Adjectives with the suffixes *-lich* (from some verbs, see 20.3.1f) or *-fähig* (from some verbal nouns) have similar force:

Seine Antwort war unverständlich (= Seine Antwort konnte nicht verstanden werden)	<i>His answer was incomprehensible/could not be understood</i>
Dieser Apparat ist nicht weiter entwicklungsfähig (= Dieser Apparat kann nicht weiter entwickelt werden)	<i>This apparatus cannot be developed further</i>

werden)

developed further

Mood: the imperative and the subjunctive

The grammatical category of **MOOD** makes it possible for speakers to signal their attitude to what they are saying, in particular to indicate whether what they are saying is to be understood as a fact, a possibility or a command.

German has three moods, the **INDICATIVE**, the **IMPERATIVE** and the **SUBJUNCTIVE**, and these are shown by special verb endings or forms. [Table 14.1](#) shows some typical examples of verb forms in the three moods.

[Table 14.1](#) The moods of German

Indicative	Subjunctive	Imperative
sie ist	sie sei	sei!
sie kauft	sie kaufe	kaufe!
sie kam	sie käme	kommt!
sie wird wandern	sie würde wandern	wandern Sie!

All the **forms** of the **indicative** and the **imperative** in the **active** voice are given in [Tables 10.10–10.13](#), and in the **passive** in [Tables 10.14](#) and [10.15](#). The formation of the **subjunctive** mood is explained in section 10.5 and all the forms are shown in [Tables 10.16 – 10.22](#).

- The **INDICATIVE** mood presents what the speaker is saying as a fact

The **indicative** is the most frequent mood, used in **all kinds of statements** and in **questions** – in effect in all contexts where speakers do not want to give a

command or to signal that what they are saying may not be the fact. As it is the ‘normal’ or default mood, its use is not treated specifically in this chapter.

- The **IMPERATIVE** mood is used in commands and requests

As we normally address these to the person we are talking to, the **imperative** mood only has special forms in the **second person** (i.e. the ‘you’-form). The uses of the imperative in German are treated in section 14.1, together with the other ways of giving commands and requests.

- The **SUBJUNCTIVE** mood presents what the speaker is saying as not necessarily true

If we use the **subjunctive**, we are characterizing an activity, an event or a state as **unreal, possible** or, at best, **not necessarily true** (hence its old German name of *Möglichkeitsform*). English has few distinct subjunctive forms, and these often sound archaic or artificial even in formal registers, but the subjunctive is still widely used in all registers in German, in particular to **signal a possibility** and in **indirect speech**. Full information is given in the following sections, which cover:

- The **forms and tenses** of the subjunctive (section 14.2)
- The subjunctive in **conditional sentences** (section 14.3)
- The use of the subjunctive in **indirect speech** (section 14.4)
- **Other uses** of the subjunctive (section 14.5)

14.1 Commands and the imperative

14.1.1 The imperative mood

The most frequent means of expressing commands or requests in German is by using the imperative mood. This only has special forms for **the second person**, i.e. the person to whom the request or command is being directed. These forms are given in [Tables 10.10](#) and [10.11](#):

Kevin, **sei** doch nicht so dumm!

Angelika, **stell** (e) dich nicht so an!

Kinder, **bringt** mal die Stühle zu uns in den Garten!

Kommen Sie doch bitte herein und **nehmen** Sie Platz, Frau Meier!

In speech the imperative is typically used with the modal particles **mal** (see 9.1.22) and/or **doch** (see 9.1.7). Without one of these, a spoken command may sound insistent or harsh. Other modal particles commonly used with the imperative to alter the tone of a command are **ja** (9.1.19), **nur** (9.1.25), **ruhig** (9.1.27) and **schon** (9.1.29).

A pronoun is normally only used in the **Sie** form of the imperative, but **du** or **ihr** are occasionally added to the simple imperative forms for emphasis:

Bestell du inzwischen das Frühstück! (<i>Wendt</i>)	<i>Meanwhile, you order breakfast</i>
Kinder, wir kommen gleich. Geht ihr schon vor!	<i>Children, we're just coming. You go first.</i>

14.1.2 Commands and requests in the first and third person

As the imperative only has special forms in the second person, other forms have to be used for commands and requests involving the first or third person.

(a) Commands and requests in the first person plural

In English, these are typically in the form **Let's do something**. German has a number of equivalents for this:

- (i) using the **first person plural** form of **Konjunktiv I**, with the verb first:

Seien wir dankbar, dass nichts passiert ist!	<i>Let's be grateful that nothing happened!</i>
Na, also, gehen wir ganz langsam	

(<i>Fallada</i>)	Well then, let's walk quite slowly
Also, trinken wir doch noch ein Glas Wein!	<i>All right, let's have another glass of wine then!</i>

Only the verb *sein* shows that it is the subjunctive which is being used in this construction, as this is the only verb with a distinctive first person plural *Konjunktiv I* form.

(ii) using the **imperative** of *lassen*. This construction is rather formal:

Lass uns jetzt ganz langsam gehen!	Lasst uns dankbar sein!
Lassen Sie uns doch noch ein Glas Wein trinken!	

(iii) using the modal auxiliary *wollen*:

Wir wollen doch noch ein Glas Wein trinken, oder?

Questions with *wollen*, e.g. *Wollen wir jetzt nach Hause gehen?* have the force of a suggestion, rather like English 'Shall we...?' (see 15.7.1b).

(b) Commands and requests in the third person

These can be used to **ask someone else** to tell a third person to do something, as in English *Let/Have her come in*, or when issuing general instructions to anyone concerned.

(i) Third person commands are most often expressed with *sollen*, see 15.6.1b:

Er soll hereinkommen	<i>Let him come in/Tell him to come in</i>
Sie sollen draußen bleiben	Tell them to stay outside
Man soll hier nicht parken	<i>There's no parking here</i>

(ii) *Konjunktiv I* can be used in third person commands (see 14.5.6d):

Es sage uns niemand, es gebe keine Alternative mehr (<i>Augstein</i>)	<i>Let nobody tell us that there is no longer any alternative</i>
--	---

Er **komme** sofort

Let him come at once

A generalized command or instruction (i.e. ‘to whom it may concern’) can be expressed by using **Konjunktiv I** with the pronoun **man**:

Man **schlage** 4 Eiweiß zu steifem Schnee *Beat 4 egg whites until stiff*

These constructions with **Konjunktiv I** now sound a little old-fashioned. **sollen** is preferred for third person commands, and the **infinitive** for generalized commands and instructions (see 14.1.3a).

(iii) In formal registers **Konjunktiv I** of the modal auxiliary **mögen** can be used to express a command or instruction to a third person (see 15.4.4), e.g.:

Er **möge** sofort kommen
Wer weiß, wo sich Hans Mayer
aufhält, **möge** sich umgehend mit
dem Gendarmerieposten Liezen in
Verbindung setzen (KlZ)

*He should come in at once
Anybody who has knowledge of Hans
Mayer’s whereabouts should get in
touch immediately with the police
station in Liezen*

14.1.3 Other ways of expressing commands and requests

Apart from the imperative mood, some other constructions can be used to express commands, requests, instructions and the like.

(a) The infinitive is often used in official commands and instructions

(See also 11.3.3a.) Using the infinitive makes the command sound more general and less directed at a particular person or group:

Nicht r **auchen** ! Bitte
anschnallen !
Erst **gurten**, dann **starten**

*No smoking. Fasten seat belts
Fasten your safety belt before setting off (official
advice to motorists)*

Bitte **einsteigen!**
4 Eiweiß zu sehr steifem
Schnee **schlagen**

Please get in (railway announcement)
Beat 4 egg whites until stiff (cooking instruction)

With reflexive verbs, the reflexive pronoun is omitted, e.g. **Nicht hinauslehnen !** (from **sich hinauslehnen** ‘lean out’).

(b) The past participle is sometimes used for depersonalized commands

In practice, this construction is limited to idiomatic usage with a small number of verbs (see also 11.5.3a):

Abgemacht!
Aufgepasst!
Stillgestanden!

Agreed!
Look out!
Attention! (military command)

(c) The subjectless passive can have the force of a command

See also 13.1.4d. The speaker can include him/herself in the instruction:

Jetzt wird gearbeitet!
Hier wird nicht geraucht!

Let's get down to work now
No smoking here!

(d) Statements or questions in the present or future can serve as commands

i.e. by being given the characteristic intonation of a command, as in English. These always sound more blunt than the simple imperative. In this way, any of the following could be used for English ‘Are you going to listen now?!’ or ‘You’re going to listen now!’:

Hörst du jetzt zu?!

Du hörst jetzt zu!

Wirst du jetzt zuhören?!

Du wirst jetzt zuhören!

(e) The modal auxiliary *sollen* can be used with the force of a command

This usage is linked to the basic meaning of *sollen*, which expresses obligation, see 15.6.1b:

Du **sollst** das Fenster zumachen

(I want you to) shut the window

Sie **sollen** ihr sofort schreiben

(You should) write to her at once

sollen is often used to repeat a command to someone who appears not to have heard the first time: *Du sollst sofort nach Hause kommen!* Commands in indirect speech are also most often given with *sollen*, e.g. *Sie sagte ihm, dass er sie am Dienstag anrufen sollte* ‘She told him to call her on Tuesday’. For the use of *sollen* in third person commands see 14.1.2b.

(f) A *dass*-clause in isolation can be used as a command

These are emotive in tone and are usually accompanied by the particle *ja* (see 9.1.19) and/or an ‘ethic’ dative (see 2.5.2d):

Dass du **mir** (ja) gut aufpasst!

Be careful for my sake

Dass ihr **ja** der Mutter nichts davon erzählt!

Just don't tell your mother anything about it

14.2 The subjunctive: forms and uses

Although the SUBJUNCTIVE is widely used in modern German, some forms and uses are nowadays restricted to formal registers, while others have become obsolete. Even educated native speakers are often uncertain and insecure about

what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘correct’ usage, and there is often a gulf between what people think they **ought** to say or write and what they actually **do** say or write.

Few other aspects of German grammar have attracted so much attention from self-appointed guardians of the language and sundry pedants, and information in German grammar books and even teaching manuals for foreign learners is often at variance with actual usage. This does not make it easy to describe modern usage clearly for the English-speaking learner, but the following sections attempt to set out as clearly and accurately as possible how the subjunctive is actually used in modern German, concentrating on those usages which are most likely to be encountered in practice or needed when speaking and writing German.

14.2.1 The forms of the subjunctive: *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II*

[Table 14.2](#) The forms of *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II*

Konjunktiv I	present subjunctive perfect subjunctive future subjunctive	es gebe es habe gegeben es werde geben
Konjunktiv II	past subjunctive pluperfect subjunctive conditional	es gäbe es hätte gegeben es würde geben

The forms of the subjunctive are traditionally referred to by the names of the tenses, e.g. **present subjunctive** (*es gebe*), **past subjunctive** (*es gäbe*), **perfect subjunctive** (*es habe gegeben*), etc. Detailed information on these forms is given in section 10.5 and [Tables 10.16](#) – [10.22](#).

Despite the traditional names, the six forms of the subjunctive do not correspond to time differences in the same way as the tenses of the indicative, and these traditional terms are misleading. Many modern German grammars group the subjunctive forms into two sets which they call *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II* as set out in [Table 14.2](#), and these terms will be adopted here since they make it easier to explain how the subjunctive is used in German.

14.2.2 The uses of *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II*

(a) *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II* have distinct uses

These have **nothing to do with time or tense**, and the so-called ‘present subjunctive’ and ‘past subjunctive’ can both refer to the present, as the following examples show:

Gisela sagt ihrer Mutter, sie komme um sechs in Berlin an	<i>Gisela is telling her mother that she is arriving in Berlin at six</i>
Wenn ich es jetzt wüsste , könnte ich es dir sagen	<i>If I knew it now, I would be able to tell you</i>

The main use of the present subjunctive and all *Konjunktiv I* forms is to mark indirect speech, see 14.4.

The main use of the past subjunctive and all *Konjunktiv II* forms is to indicate an unreal condition or a possibility, see 14.3.

(b) Indicating time differences in the subjunctive

The difference between **present and past time** is expressed in *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II* by using the ‘perfect’ or ‘pluperfect’ subjunctives:

(i) The **perfect subjunctive** functions as the past tense of *Konjunktiv I*:

Gisela sagt ihrer Mutter, sie sei um sechs in Berlin angekommen	<i>Gisela is telling her mother that she arrived in Berlin at six</i>
--	---

(ii) The **pluperfect subjunctive** functions as the past tense of *Konjunktiv II*:

Wenn ich es damals gewusst hätte , hätte ich es dir sagen können	<i>If I had known it then, I would have been able to tell you</i>
--	---

14.2.3 *Konjunktiv II* and *würde*

Konjunktiv II has three forms as illustrated in [Table 14.3](#).

[Table 14.3](#) The forms of *Konjunktiv II*

Past subjunctive	Pluperfect subjunctive	Conditional
ich hätte	ich hätte gehabt	ich würde haben
ich wäre	ich wäre gewesen	ich würde sein
ich käme	ich wäre gekommen	ich würde kommen
ich schliefе	ich hätte geschlafen	ich würde schlafen
ich machte	ich hätte gemacht	ich würde machen

As explained in 14.2.2, the ‘past subjunctive’ typically refers to **present time**, and the ‘pluperfect subjunctive’ to the **past**. The **conditional** with *würde* can be used as a ‘future-in-the-past’ (see (c) below), but it most often occurs as a **substitute for the past subjunctive**, as explained below.

(a) The conditional form with *würde* often replaces the simple past subjunctive

The conditional form is often used instead of the simple past subjunctive, in exactly the same meanings and contexts, so that people say or write *ich würde schlafen* rather than *ich schliefе*.

Which one is used depends on **the individual verb** involved and on **register**. The use of the simple forms is still often encouraged by German school teachers and traditionalists as a mark of good style, but in practice they often sound stilted or archaic, and they are avoided. Modern usage is as follows:

- (i) With **weak verbs** the simple form is only used if the subjunctive meaning is otherwise clear from the context. This is because their past subjunctive form is exactly the same as the past indicative:

Wenn sie das Fenster **aufmachte**, *If she opened the window, we would*

hätten wir frische Luft im Zimmer *have some fresh air in the room*

Although *aufmachte* could be ambiguous (in isolation we would have no way of knowing whether it is indicative or subjunctive), the **clear *Konjunktiv II* form *hätte*** in the other half of the sentence makes it clear that the whole sentence is to be understood as expressing possibility.

However, the past subjunctive forms of weak verbs are in practice never used in spoken German, which will always prefer the conditional:

Wenn sie das Fenster **aufmachen würde**, hätten wir frische Luft im Zimmer

In fact, the simple past subjunctive of weak verbs is nowadays unusual even in writing, and if the subjunctive meaning is not clear from the context, the conditional must be used:

Bei der Hitze würde ich das Fenster aufmachen	<i>With this heat I would open the window</i>
--	---

(ii) With **common irregular verbs** only the past subjunctive form is usual.

This applies in particular to ***sein*, *haben*, *werden*** and the **modal auxiliaries**. With these, the simple forms ***wäre*, *hätte*, *würde*, *könnte*, *müsste***, etc. **are preferred** in both spoken and written German. The conditional forms *würde sein*, *würde haben*, etc. are unusual in any register, unless there is a sense of ‘future-in-the-past’.

(iii) The past subjunctive forms of a few other **common strong or irregular verbs** are quite frequent. In particular, the past subjunctive forms and conditional of the following verbs are roughly equally frequent in written German:

finden fände	halten hielte	lassen ließe	tun täte
geben gäbe	heißen hieß	sprechen spräche	wissen wüsste
gehen ginge	kommen käme	stehen stünde	

käme*, *täte and ***wüsste*** are also not unusual in spoken German, as well as in writing, and the

simple forms of the other verbs in this group are sometimes heard in speech, too.

(iv) The past subjunctive forms of the **other strong or irregular** verbs are not often used. They only occur nowadays in formal registers, and even there they are less common than the conditional forms, so that, for example, *sie würde schlafen* or *sie würde hier sitzen* are more frequent than *sie schlief* or *sie säße hier*. In practice, despite the efforts of generations of schoolteachers and linguistic purists, the past subjunctive forms of many less common strong verbs, in particular most of the irregular ones and those in -ö- and -ü- (e.g. *begönne*, *flösse*, *verdürbe*), are felt to be impossibly stilted and even comical. Many Germans do not even know the forms, and they are generally avoided even in writing. The forms which are no longer used in practice are given in italics in [Table 10.23](#).

(b) The pluperfect of *Konjunktiv II* forms with *würde ... haben/sein* are infrequent

The pluperfect subjunctive is composed of *hätte* or *wäre* (depending on whether the verb forms its perfect tenses with *haben* or *sein*) together with the past participle:

Ich **hätte** geschlafen
Ich **wäre** gekommen

I would have slept
I would have come

Longer forms, e.g. *ich würde geschlafen haben* or *ich würde gekommen sein* are occasionally seen or heard, but they are much less common than the shorter forms with *hätte* or *wäre*, especially in writing.

(c) The conditional is often used in the sense of a future-in-the-past

i.e. where the speaker or writer is looking forward within a narrative in the past tense, e.g.:

Er wusste viel besser als Chénier, dass er
keine Eingebung **haben würde**; er hatte
nämlich noch nie eine gehabt (*Süßkind*)
Ich beschloss, sobald ich groß **sein würde**,
Spengler zu lesen (*Dönhoff*)
Ich war sicher, dass ich den Job nicht
kriegen würde

*He knew much better than Chénier
that he would not have an
inspiration, because he had never
had one
I decided I would read Spengler as
soon as I was grown up
I was sure I wouldn't get the job*

The simple past subjunctive is hardly ever used in contexts of this type.

14.3 Conditional sentences

Typical **CONDITIONAL SENTENCES** consist of a subordinate clause, introduced by the conjunction **wenn** (= English 'if'), expressing a condition, and a main clause, expressing the consequence, as shown in [Table 14.4](#):

[Table 14.4](#) Conditional sentences

Condition	Consequence
Wenn du den Wein kaufst, <i>If you buy the wine</i>	mache ich das Abendessen <i>I will cook dinner</i>
Wenn ich genug Zeit hätte, <i>If I had enough time</i>	käme ich gern mit <i>I would gladly come with you</i>
Wenn sie mich fragen würde, <i>If she asked me</i>	würde ich ihr alles sagen <i>I would tell her everything</i>
Wenn ich gewonnen hätte, <i>If I had won</i>	wäre ich nach Amerika gefahren <i>I would have gone to America</i>

We can distinguish '**open**' **conditional sentences**, where there is a real possibility of the condition being met, and '**remote**' **conditional sentences**, where this possibility is at best a remote one. Compare:

Open: Wenn Anna da **ist**, **kann** sie gern mitkommen

Remote: Wenn Anna da **wäre**, **könnte** sie gern mitkommen

German typically uses the **indicative** in ‘open’ conditional sentences (see 14.3.2), but **Konjunktiv II** in ‘remote’ conditional sentences (see 14.3.1).

14.3.1 *Konjunktiv II* in remote conditional sentences

(a) Remote conditional sentences in the present

The past subjunctive or conditional form of *Konjunktiv II* is used to express an **unreal condition** in the present:

Wenn wir Zeit hätten, könnten wir einen Ausflug machen	<i>If we had time, we would be able to go on an excursion</i>
Die Europäer wären erleichtert, wenn England wieder austreten würde (<i>Zeit</i>)	The Europeans would be relieved if England pulled out again
Wenn ich 200 000 Euro im Lotto gewinnen würde, würde ich eine Villa auf Teneriffa kaufen	<i>If I won 200,000 euros in the lottery I would buy a villa on Tenerife</i>

Konjunktiv II is used in **both the *wenn* -clause and the main clause** in German. This contrasts with English, which typically uses the past tense in the ‘if’-clause, and the conditional (with ‘would’) in the main clause. Either the past subjunctive or the conditional can be used in German in either clause, with the choice depending on register and the individual verb involved, as explained in 14.2.3a.

Grammarians and schoolteachers have long argued that the conditional with *würde* should only be used in the main clause, or that sentences with two conditionals should be avoided as they are clumsy. However, these prescriptions are widely ignored in both spoken and written German, especially if the simple *Konjunktiv II* forms of the verbs involved are obsolete or not used, as in the last example above and the following:

Die Telefonleitungen sind ohnehin sehr schlecht, also würde es kaum etwas ausmachen, wenn auch sie zerstört werden	<i>The telephone cables are very bad anyway, so it would hardly make any difference if they were destroyed</i>
---	--

würden (SZ)

as well

Nevertheless, the most common pattern in conditional sentences is with a simple *Konjunktiv II* form in the *wenn* -clause and a conditional with *würde* in the main clause:

Ich würde den schönen Top kaufen , wenn ich genug Geld hätte	<i>I would buy that nice top if I had enough money</i>
--	--

(b) Remote conditional sentences in the past

Conditional sentences with the **pluperfect subjunctive** express a **hypothetical possibility in the past** – something which typically did not come about. The **pluperfect subjunctive** is used in **both** the *wenn* -clause and the main clause:

Wenn ich es nicht mit eigenen Augen gesehen hätte , hätte ich es nicht geglaubt	<i>If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it</i>
Wenn mich jener Anruf nicht mehr erreicht hätte , wären wir einander nie begegnet (<i>Frisch</i>)	<i>If that call hadn't managed to reach me, we would never have met</i>
Es wäre besser für mich gewesen , wenn ich hätte absagen können (<i>Böll</i>)	<i>It would have been better for me if I had been able to refuse</i>

(c) Time differences between the clauses in conditional sentences

If there is a difference in time between the main clause and the *wenn*- clause, this can be indicated by using the **past subjunctive/conditional** forms or the **pluperfect** forms as appropriate:

Wäre Sarkozy schon im ersten Wahlgang gewählt worden , würde die französische Bevölkerung schon jetzt das Datum kennen Ich säße hier nicht auf demselben Stuhl, wenn wir bisher diesen Punkt nicht erreicht	<i>If Sarkozy had already been elected in the first ballot the French people would already know the date I wouldn't be sitting here in the same chair if we hadn't already</i>
---	--

hätten (*Zeit*)

reached this point

(d) Other auxiliary verbs used in remote conditional sentences

(i) The *Konjunktiv II* of **sollen** is often used in the *wenn*- clause. This normally points to the future, and the meaning is similar to using ‘should’ or ‘were to’ in English:

Wenn sie mich fragen sollte , würde ich ihr alles sagen	<i>If she were to ask me, I would tell her everything</i>
Er hält sich bereit, aus der Bodenluke zu springen, wenn sich nachts ein Auto der Sägemühle nähern sollte (<i>Strittmatter</i>)	<i>He is ready to jump out of the skylight if a car should approach the sawmill at night</i>

(ii) The *Konjunktiv II* of **wollen** is frequently used in the *wenn*- clause, often with only a faint suggestion of its basic meaning of ‘want’, ‘intend’:

Wenn du schneller arbeiten wolltest , könntest du mehr verdienen	<i>If you worked a bit faster you could earn more</i>
Wie wäre es, wenn wir ihr helfen wollten ?	<i>What about us helping her?</i>

wollen is particularly common in formal registers if *wenn* is omitted (see 14.3.3a):

Es würde uns zu lange aufhalten, wollten wir alle diese Probleme ausführlich behandeln	<i>It would detain us too long if we were to treat all these problems in detail</i>
---	---

(iii) The *Konjunktiv II* of **tun** (i.e. **täte**) is common in colloquial speech instead of *würde*, especially in the South, see 11.3.1d. This is generally considered to be a non-standard regionalism, although it is very widespread:

Wenn ich jetzt losfahren täte , so könnte ich schon vor zwölf in Augsburg sein	<i>If I set off now, I could be in Augsburg as early as twelve</i>
--	--

14.3.2 Open conditional sentences

The **indicative** is used in conditional sentences which express ‘open’ conditions, i.e. where there is a real possibility of the conditions being met. These correspond to conditional sentences without ‘would’ in English. In English, the future tense is the norm in the main clause of such sentences, but in German the present is at least as frequent, see 12.1.3:

Wenn sie immer noch krank ist , muss ich morgen allein kommen	<i>If she's still ill, I'll have to come on my own tomorrow</i>
Wenn ich ihr jetzt schreibe , bekommt sie den Brief morgen	<i>If I write to her now, she'll get the letter tomorrow</i>
Wenn wir jetzt losfahren , werden wir schon vor zwölf in Augsburg sein	<i>If we set off now, we'll be in Augsburg by twelve</i>

If one half of a conditional sentence is seen as hypothetical, but the other as factual, the first can be in the subjunctive and the second in the indicative:

Was würdet ihr tun , wenn ihr mitbekommt , dass euer Freund mit anderen Frauen simst ?	<i>What would you do if you find out that your boyfriend has been texting other women?</i>
--	--

With the past tense, the sense is usually that the conditions have been met, and *wenn* is typically very close to the meaning ‘whenever’, see 17.3.1e:

Wenn meine Eltern mir Geld schickten , kaufte ich mir sofort etwas zum Anziehen	<i>If/Whenever my parents sent me money I immediately bought something to wear</i>
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14.3.3 Other forms of conditional sentences

A typical conditional sentence has a *wenn* -clause and a main clause, as shown in [Table 14.4](#), but there are a number of possible variations on this pattern.

(a) The conjunction *wenn* can be omitted

In this case the subordinate clause begins with the verb:

Hätte ich Zeit, käme ich gern mit Ist sie krank, muss er morgen allein kommen Sollte ich nach Berlin kommen, würde ich sie sicher besuchen	<i>If I had time, I should like to come with you</i> If she's ill, he'll have to come on his own tomorrow <i>If I should get to Berlin I'd be sure to visit her</i>
---	--

This construction can be compared to the similar, rather old-fashioned English construction, e.g. 'Had I time, ...'. As a general rule, it is more typical of formal writing, although sentences with *sollte*, in particular, are not unusual in the spoken language, and it is often used in legal or quasi-legal contexts. Occasionally, the main clause comes first:

Das Bild wäre unvollständig, würden nicht die vielen Gruppen erwähnt, die den Einwanderern das Leben leichter machen (FR)	<i>The picture would be incomplete if the many groups were not mentioned who make life easier for the immigrants</i>
---	--

(b) Using *so* or *dann* in a following main clause

If the *wenn*-clause comes first in the sentence, it can be picked up by *so* or *dann* at the start of the main clause. This so-called 'correlating' *so* or *dann* is optional, but quite common:

Wenn ich Zeit hätte, (**so** / **dann**) käme ich gern mit

Wenn ich ihr heute schreibe, (**so** / **dann**) bekommt sie den Brief morgen

However, it is very frequently used if *wenn* is omitted (see (a) above):

Hätte ich Zeit, (**so**) käme ich gern mit

Ist sie krank, (**so**) muss ich morgen allein kommen

Sollte ich nach Berlin kommen, (so) würde ich sie sicher besuchen

(c) The condition may appear in another form

i.e. not in a *wenn* -clause but in an adverbial or another kind of clause. *Konjunktiv II* indicates a remote possibility, or, with a pluperfect subjunctive, something which might have happened, but didn't:

Dieser Unbekannte würde mich wahrscheinlich besser verstehen (<i>Böll</i>)	<i>This stranger would probably understand me better</i>
Ohne die Notlandung in Tamaulipas wäre alles anders gekommen (<i>Frisch</i>)	But for the emergency landing in Tamaulipas everything would have turned out differently
Wer diese Entwicklung vorausgesehen hätte, hätte viel Geld verdienen können	<i>Anyone foreseeing this development would have been able to make a lot of money</i>

In some sentences the condition is implicit:

Lieber bliebe ich zu Hause (i.e. an deiner Stelle)	<i>I would rather stay at home</i>
Ich hätte dasselbe getan (i.e. wenn ich die Wahl gehabt hätte)	<i>I would have done the same</i>

(d) Other conjunctions used in conditional sentences

wenn is the predominant conjunction in conditional sentences, but there are other possibilities:

(i) *falls* 'if' unambiguously introduces a condition.

wenn can also mean 'when(ever)' (see 17.3.1e), and *falls* can be useful to make the sense clear in contexts where a misunderstanding could be possible. A sentence like:

Wenn ich nach Berlin komme, besuche ich sie

could mean ‘When(ever) I get to Berlin I visit her’ or ‘If I get to Berlin I shall visit her’. But **Falls** *ich nach Berlin komme, besuche ich sie* can only mean ‘If I get to Berlin I shall visit her’.

falls most often introduces ‘open’ conditions, with the indicative (see 14.3.2), but it does occasionally occur with *Konjunktiv II*, and it is particularly frequent with *sollte*:

Sie kann niemanden ins Oberhaus befördern lassen, falls er einen unsicheren Wahlkreis vertritt (FAZ)	<i>She can’t elevate anybody into the Upper House if he doesn’t have a safe seat</i>
Falls diese Hinweise zuträfen, wäre das eine eindeutige Verletzung der Abmachungen (MM)	<i>If these indications were correct, that would be a clear infringement of the agreements</i>
Man hielt eine Ratskonferenz für denkbar, jedoch nur, falls Frankreich dem Haushalt die Zustimmung verweigern sollte (FAZ)	<i>A meeting of the Council was considered conceivable, but only if France should refuse to give its consent to the budget</i>

(ii) **angenommen, dass** ... and **vorausgesetzt, dass** ... ‘assuming that’, ‘provided that’ mainly introduce open conditions.

Angenommen, dass er den Brief erhalten hat, wird er bald hier sein	<i>Assuming he got the letter, he’ll be here soon</i>
Vorausgesetzt, dass nichts dazwischen kommt, ziehen wir im Frühjahr nach Graz um	<i>Provided that all goes well, we’ll be moving to Graz in the spring</i>

The conjunction *dass* can be omitted, and the following clause then has the word order of a main clause, e.g. **Angenommen** , *er hat den Brief erhalten, wird er bald hier sein*.

(iii) **sofern** can be used in the sense of ‘if’, ‘provided that’ or ‘as long as’ in open conditions:

Sofern es die Witterungsbedingungen erlauben, findet die Aufführung im Freien vor der alten Abtei statt	<i>If weather conditions permit, the performance will take place in the open air in front of the old abbey</i>
--	--

(iv) **selbst wenn, auch wenn, sogar wenn, wenn ... auch** all correspond to English ‘even if’. For example, the German equivalent of ‘Even if she were to call today, she wouldn’t get any tickets’, could be any of the following:

Selbst wenn sie heute anrufen sollte, Auch wenn sie heute anrufen sollte, Sogar wenn sie heute anrufen sollte, Wenn sie auch heute anrufen sollte,	} würde sie keine Karten bekommen
--	-----------------------------------

(v) **es sei denn, (dass)** ... ‘unless’ is mainly used in ‘open’ conditions. The conjunction *dass* can be omitted, and the following clause then has the word order of a main clause:

Ich komme um zwei, es sei denn , ich werde aufgehalten/dass ich aufgehalten werde	<i>I’ll come at two, unless I’m held up</i>
--	---

In older literary styles **denn** on its own can have this meaning:

„Ich lasse dich nicht fort“, rief sie, „du sagst mir denn , was du im Sinn hast“ (Wiechert)	<i>‘I shan’t let you go’, she cried, ‘unless you tell me what you have in mind’</i>
--	---

(vi) **wenn ... nicht** is the usual equivalent of English ‘unless’ as well as ‘if ... not’. It is used with open or remote conditions, in the latter case with *Konjunktiv II*:

Wenn er nicht bald kommt, wird es zu spät sein	<i>Unless he comes soon/If he doesn’t come soon, it will be too late</i>
Er hätte es nicht gesagt, wenn er nicht schuldig wäre	He wouldn’t have said it unless he was guilty
Du brauchst die Suppe nicht zu essen, wenn du sie wirklich nicht magst	<i>You needn’t eat the soup if you really don’t like it</i>

14.4 Indirect speech

14.4.1 Indirect and direct speech

(a) Indirect speech

In INDIRECT SPEECH we report what someone said by putting it into a sentence of our own. This is sometimes called ‘reported speech’.

In DIRECT SPEECH, on the other hand, we quote exactly what someone said in the original spoken form (using inverted commas in writing). Compare the following English examples:

Direct speech:	She said, ‘I am writing a letter’
Indirect speech:	She said that she was writing a letter

There are marked differences in English between direct and indirect speech. In particular, we put what was said in a **subordinate clause** of its own (typically introduced by ‘that’), the **pronoun** can be altered (especially from the first person to the third person) and the **tense is shifted** to the past.

(b) In German indirect speech can be indicated by using *Konjunktiv I*

Konjunktiv I is used, rather than shifting the tense as in English:

Direct speech:	Sie sagte: „Ich schreibe einen Brief“
Indirect speech:	Sie sagte, dass sie einen Brief schreibe

This is the most important use of *Konjunktiv I* in modern German – so much so that *Konjunktiv I* on its own is often enough to indicate indirect speech.

However, the use of *Konjunktiv I* to mark indirect speech varies

considerably. It is much less often used in informal registers, and there is considerable uncertainty among native speakers in respect of correct usage.

The conjunction *dass*, like English ‘that’, can be left out after the verb of saying, see 17.2.1b. In this case, the following clause has the order of a main clause, with the verb in second place (see 19.1.1a), e.g. *Sie sagte, sie **schreibe** einen Brief.*

14.4.2 The use of the subjunctive to mark indirect speech

The **accepted standard use of the subjunctive in indirect speech**, as prescribed in all modern grammars of German for written registers, is illustrated with examples in [Table 14.5](#) and summarized in the rules given in the rest of this section.

[Table 14.5](#) Standard rules for the use of the subjunctive in indirect speech

Rule	Original tense	Direct speech	Indirect speech
Rule 1 Use <i>Konjunktiv I</i> in indirect speech, keeping the same tense as in the original direct speech	present past perfect future	„Sie weiß es” ‘She knows it’ „Sie wusste es” ‘She knew it’ „Sie hat es gewusst” ‘She knew/has known it’ „Sie wird es wissen”	Er sagte, sie wisse es <i>He said she knew it</i> Er sagte, sie habe es gewusst <i>He said she had known it</i> Er sagte, sie habe es gewusst <i>He said she had known it</i> Er sagte, sie werde es wissen

		<i>'She will know it'</i>	<i>He said she would know it</i>
Rule 2 If the <i>Konjunktiv I</i> form is the same as the indicative, use <i>Konjunktiv II</i>	present past perfect future	„Sie wissen es” <i>'They know it'</i> „Sie wussten es” <i>'They knew it'</i> „Sie haben es gewusst” <i>'They knew/have known it'</i> „Sie werden es wissen” <i>'They will know it'</i>	Er sagte, sie wüssten es <i>He said they knew it</i> Er sagte, sie hätten es gewusst <i>He said they had known it</i> Er sagte, sie hätten es gewusst <i>He said they had known it</i> Er sagte, sie würden es wissen <i>He said they would know it</i>

(a) RULE 1: *Konjunktiv I* is used to mark indirect speech wherever possible

i.e. as long as the forms of *Konjunktiv I* are clearly distinct from those of the present indicative

- (i) In practice, for almost all verbs except *sein*, this is the case only in the **third person singular**, where the ending - *e* of *Konjunktiv I* (e.g. *sie schreib e*) differs from the present indicative ending - *t* (e.g. *sie schreib t*)
- (ii) The basic principle is that the same tense of *Konjunktiv I* is used for the

indirect speech as was used in the indicative in the original direct speech, as shown in the examples in [Table 14.5](#). The only exception to this principle is that **if the original direct speech was in the past or the pluperfect tense, the perfect subjunctive is used in indirect speech**. In this way the following sentences of direct speech all become *Sie sagte, sie habe es nicht gewusst* in indirect speech:

„Ich wusste es nicht“	„Ich habe es nicht gewusst “	„Ich hatte es nicht gewusst “
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(iii) Complex pluperfect forms are sometimes used if the original direct speech was in the pluperfect, e.g. *Sie sagte, sie habe es nicht **gewusst gehabt***. Such constructions are not considered standard.

(iv) If the present tense of the original direct speech refers to the future (see 12.2.3), the future subjunctive is often used in indirect speech, as an alternative to the present subjunctive. In this way, there are two possibilities for converting the following sentence into indirect speech:

„Sie heiratet bald“	Sie sagte, sie heirate bald or Sie sagte, sie werde bald heiraten
----------------------------	--

(b) RULE 2: If the form of *Konjunktiv I* is the same as the indicative, *Konjunktiv II* is used

The principle underlying this **replacement rule** is that indirect speech should be marked by a distinct subjunctive form if possible. This is typically needed in the third person plural, where only *sein* has a *Konjunktiv I* form (*sie seien*) which differs from the form of the present indicative (see [Table 10.17](#)).

For example, to turn the sentence „*Wir wissen es nicht*“ into indirect speech, we cannot use the *Konjunktiv I* form *sie wissen*, because it is not different from the present indicative. It is replaced by the *Konjunktiv II* form: *Sie sagten, sie **wüssten** es nicht*. [Table 14.5](#) gives more examples of the application of this rule for the other tenses.

These standard rules for the use of the subjunctive in indirect speech are adhered to with particular consistency in newspapers. By using *Konjunktiv I* we can indicate that we are simply reporting what someone else said, without committing ourselves to saying whether we think it is true or not. This makes it a handy device for journalists (especially when reporting politicians?!) and newspapers make wide use of it:

Der Bundespressechef verwies darauf, dass in den kommenden Gesprächen noch manches verfeinert werden könne (FAZ)	<i>The Federal government press officer pointed out that some things could be refined in future discussions</i>
M. erklärte, die Bahn könne das Betriebsrisiko nicht übernehmen, auch wenn es zusätzliche öffentliche Mittel für den Bau der Strecke gebe (Presse)	<i>M. explained that the Federal Railways could not take on the operational risks even if there were additional public funds to build the line</i>

(c) The subjunctive as the only indicator of indirect speech

Konjunktiv I in particular is such a clear marker of indirect speech that it can be used on its own to show that a statement is reported. This means that German can often dispense with repeated cues like ‘He said that ...’, ‘He went on to say that ...’ which are usually needed in English. Almost any newspaper report will provide examples of how this possibility is exploited:

Der Regierungssprecher bedauerte die Veröffentlichung. Die Dokumente **seien** „auf illegale Art und Weise an die Öffentlichkeit gelangt“. Die robusten und festen Beziehungen zu den USA **würden** aber in „keiner Weise“ betrübt. Es **gebe** eine in Jahrzehnten gewachsene tiefe Freundschaft, die auf gemeinsamen Werten **beruhe** und durch die Publikation „nicht ernsthaft beschädigt wird“. Passagen über deutsche Politiker **hätten** eher das „Niveau des Lästerns“. (SZ)

Note the alternation of *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II* forms according to the ‘replacement rule’ and that, even in such a sequence of main clauses without any verb of saying the subjunctive on its own is enough to signal indirect speech. Interspersing a few stretches of direct speech in quotation marks, in the indicative, is also very typical in this style of presentation in newspapers.

14.4.3 Other current usage in indirect speech

The standard rules given in 14.4.2 for the use of the subjunctive in indirect speech are in practice only observed at all closely in formal written registers, especially in newspapers and non-fiction. In everyday speech and less formal writing alternative constructions occur regularly, and these are summarized for quick reference in [Table 14.6](#).

[Table 14.6](#) Indirect speech in everyday spoken German

Formal writing: Konjunktiv I	Everyday speech: Indicative or Konjunktiv II
Er sagte, sie wisse es {	Er hat gesagt, sie weiß es Er hat gesagt, sie wüsste es
Er sagte, sie habe es gewusst {	Er hat gesagt, sie hat es gewusst Er hat gesagt, sie hätte es gewusst

(a) *Konjunktiv II* is used rather than *Konjunktiv I*

i.e. *Konjunktiv II* is used even where a distinct *Konjunktiv I* form is available. This occurs:

(i) in everyday speech:

Sie hat gesagt, sie käme heute nicht	<i>She said she wasn't coming</i>
Sie hat gesagt, sie hätte es verstanden	<i>today</i>
Sie hat gesagt, sie würde den Brief noch	She said she had understood it
heute schreiben	<i>She said she'd get the letter</i>
	<i>written today</i>

In spoken German *Konjunktiv II* is an alternative to the indicative (see (c) below), and it is often preferred when the main verb is in the past or perfect tense. *Konjunktiv II* also tends to be used if there is a longer stretch of indirect speech covering more than one sentence:

Oliver sagt, er hat eben einen neuen Wagen gekauft. Der **hätte** über 20 000 Euro gekostet und **hätte** eine Klimaanlage

Oliver says he's just bought a new car. It cost more than 20,000 euros and it's got air-conditioning

Konjunktiv I can sound rather affected in informal registers and it is rarely used in colloquial German. The only exception is that forms of *sein* are occasionally used in speech, but these often imply that the speaker has doubts. If someone says *Silke hat mir gesagt, sie **sei** heute krank* it often indicates that s/he thinks that Silke might not have been telling the whole truth.

(ii) in **writing**: *Konjunktiv II* is less frequent than *Konjunktiv I*, but it is by no means unknown, especially in fictional or biographical writing:

Sie sagte, ihr Vater **schliefe** erst gegen Morgen richtig ein und **würde** bis neun im Bett **bleiben**, und sie müsse den Laden aufmachen (*Böll*)
Tante Sissi schrieb uns, es gehe Onkel Heinrich nicht gut und sie **säße** oft an seinem Bett (*Dönhoff*)

She said that her father didn't get to sleep properly till the morning and he would stay in bed till nine and that she had to open the shop
Aunt Sissi wrote telling us that Uncle Heinrich wasn't well and she often sat at his bedside

Prescribed 'standard' usage in the above examples would be *schlafe*, *bleibe* and *sitze* respectively.

(b) The conditional with **würde** is used rather than the past subjunctive

The use of *würde* in indirect speech as a substitute for the simple past subjunctive is potentially confusing for English speakers, as they might interpret it as having the same meaning as an English conditional with 'would'.

(i) The use of *würde* is frequent in colloquial spoken German, especially since the simple past subjunctive is restricted to a few common verbs (see

14.2.3):

Er hat gemeint, ich **würde** zu schnell
reden
Er wirft mir vor, ich **würde** ihm nicht
vertrauen

He thought I talked too fast
He tells me off, saying I don't
trust him

(ii) In writing the conditional in indirect speech is frowned on by purists, but it is actually quite frequent, most often with those strong verbs whose simple *Konjunktiv II* forms are obsolete, or with weak verbs (see 14.2.3).

- It can be used for a *Konjunktiv II* required by the 'replacement rule':

Immer häufiger, berichtet
Professor N. von der Uni
Hamburg, **würden** Studenten
abends oder nachts **jobben**.
Tagsüber **seien** sie dann
furchtbar erschöpft (*Spiegel*)
Sieben Leser gaben an, sie
würden regelmäßig
Fachzeitschriften **lesen** (*MM*)

Professor N. from the University of
Hamburg reports that more and more
often students take on casual work in
the evenings or at night. During the
day they are then terribly exhausted, he
said
Seven readers declared that they
regularly read specialist journals

The conditionals are used in these examples in the case of the weak verb *jobben*, or rather than the obsolescent past subjunctive *läsen*.

- It is even used in cases where a distinct *Konjunktiv I* form is available:

Gleichzeitig informierte man die
Presse, die Polizei **würde** auch die
Namen zweier Komplizen **kennen**
(*Horizont*)

At the same time the press was
informed that the police also
knew the names of two
accomplices

The past subjunctive form *kennte* is obsolete, but in this example the unambiguous *Konjunktiv I* form *kenne* would be expected according to the standard rule.

- It can be used in place of the *Konjunktiv I* form *werde* if there is a sense of ‘future-in-the-past’ (see 14.2.4c):

Er glaubte, sie würde schon eine Lösung finden	<i>He thought that she would surely find a solution</i>
---	---

This last usage is very frequent in practice, and it is accepted in formal registers.

(c) The indicative is used rather than the subjunctive

If the main verb is in the past tense, the verb in indirect speech is usually in the tense of the original direct speech. However, it is sometimes shifted to the past tense, as in English. The indicative is used:

(i) in spoken German:

Sie hat gesagt, sie weiß es schon	<i>She said she knew it already</i>
Sie hat gesagt, sie hat es verstanden	<i>She said she had understood it</i>
Sie hat gesagt, sie wird den Brief noch heute schreiben	<i>She said she'd write the letter today</i>

In practice, the indicative is the most frequent variant in indirect speech in informal registers, although *Konjunktiv II* also occurs (see (a) above).

(ii) in writing. The indicative is fairly regular in indirect speech in written German and it is regarded as an acceptable alternative to the subjunctive in certain contexts:

- if the indirect speech is in a clause introduced by *dass*:

Der Kanzler erklärte, dass er zu weiteren Verhandlungen bereit ist / war	<i>The Chancellor declared that he was prepared to enter into further negotiations</i>
Es wurde erzählt, dass der	<i>It was recounted that the</i>

Verwalter ihnen persönlich das
Mittagessen **auftrag** (*Wiechert*)

*administrator served them
lunch in person*

If *dass* is included, the indicative is almost as frequent as the subjunctive even in written German. However, if *dass* is omitted (see 17.2.1b), then the subjunctive is considered essential in writing, e.g. *Der Kanzler erklärte, er sei zu weiteren Verhandlungen bereit.*

- if a **first** or **second person** is involved:

Er sagte ihr, von wo ich
gekommen **bin**
Er hat mir erzählt, dass der Fluss
hier tief **ist**
In deinem letzten Brief hast du
mir geschrieben, seine Tochter
studiert schon vier Semester in
Hamburg

*He told her where I had come
from
He told me that the river was
deep here
In your last letter you wrote that
his daughter had already been
studying in Hamburg for four
semesters*

The function of *Konjunktiv I* is to distance the speaker from what is being reported, i.e. to make it clear that s/he isn't willing to vouch for whether it is true or not. For this reason it may not make sense to use it when the speaker or the listener is directly involved.

- if the 'replacement rule' (see 14.4.2b) is ignored:

Die Verfügung des letzten deutschen
Kaisers besagte, dass im Ruhrgebiet
weder Universitäten noch Kasernen
gebaut werden **dürfen** (*v. d. Grün*)

*The decree by the last German
emperor declared that neither
universities nor barracks were
allowed to be built in the Ruhr*

The standard rule would require *dürfte n*, as the form *dürfen* is identical with the indicative and not a clear subjunctive. However, it is not unusual to see ambiguous forms like this in the third person plural. They are sometimes used, too, if the 'replacement rule'

produces an obsolete past subjunctive form, as in the following example:

Der Unterhändler sagte, er hoffe, dass die Vernunft siege und Verhandlungen beginnen	<i>The negotiator said he hoped that reason would prevail and talks would begin</i>
---	---

Applying the replacement rule would result in the obsolete form *begönnen*.

- for stylistic reasons, to render the flavour of colloquial speech:

Seit der Wende denken die Nazis, sie bestraft ohnehin keiner	<i>Since unification the Nazis have thought that nobody would punish them anyway</i>
---	--

(d) Alleged differences in meaning between forms in reported speech

Some authorities have claimed that there is a difference in meaning between the three possible forms:

- **Konjunktiv I:** Manfred sagte, dass er krank **gewesen sei**
- **Konjunktiv II:** Manfred sagte, dass er krank **gewesen wäre**
- **Indicative:** Manfred sagte, dass er krank **gewesen ist**

According to this theory, *Konjunktiv I* is used merely to report Manfred's statement neutrally, without offering any personal opinion as to whether it is true or false. Using *Konjunktiv II*, on the other hand, would make it clear that the speaker thinks Manfred's statement is untrue, while the speaker's use of the indicative would acknowledge that it is a fact that he had been ill.

However, although some writers appear to have attempted to apply such a distinction, it is never consistently maintained. In practice the use of the three forms is determined not by meaning, but by register, stylistic considerations and

norms of usage, as outlined in this section.

14.4.4 Indirect questions and commands

(a) Usage in indirect questions is exactly the same as in indirect statements

- (i) In formal written registers *Konjunktiv I* (or *Konjunktiv II*, by the ‘replacement rule’) is used:

Sie fragte ihn, wie alt sein Vater sei	<i>She asked him how old his father was</i>
Der Lehrer fragte uns, ob wir wüssten , was das bedeute (Böll)	<i>The teacher asked us if we knew what that meant</i>
Die Dame fragte, ob denn die Typen einer bestimmten Sorte von Schreibmaschinen alle ununterscheidbar gleich wären (Johnson)	<i>The lady asked whether the characters of a particular make of typewriter were all the same and indistinguishable from each other</i>

As in statements, *Konjunktiv II* is sometimes used even if a distinct *Konjunktiv I* form is available: *Sie fragte ihn, wie alt sein Vater **wäre**.*

The indicative occasionally occurs in indirect questions in formal writing, although it is less frequent than the subjunctive:

Warum ich nicht fragte, ob Hanna noch lebt , weiß ich nicht (Frisch)	<i>I don't know why I didn't ask whether Hanna was still alive</i>
---	--

- (ii) In spoken German, the indicative, *Konjunktiv II* or the *würd e* -form are used:

Sie hat ihn gefragt, wie alt sein Vater **ist/wäre**
Tante Emma hat sie gefragt, ob sie Hunger **hat/hätte**
Der Lehrer hat gefragt, ob sie es **wissen/wüßten/wissen würden**

(b) Commands are reported in indirect speech by using a modal verb

Konjunktiv I is used in writing, but both *Konjunktiv II* and the indicative are frequent, and these are the most usual variants in spoken German.

- (i) **sollen** is the most frequent verb used in indirect commands, see 15.6.1b. Thus the direct command *Rufe mich morgen im Büro an!* would correspond to the indirect command:

Frau Hempel sagte ihm, er solle/sollte/soll sie morgen im Büro anrufen	<i>Ms Hempel told him to call her at the office tomorrow</i>
---	--

- (ii) **müssen** indicates a more forceful command, e.g. *Frau Hempel sagte ihm, er müsse / müsste/ muss sie (unbedingt) morgen im Büro anrufen*

- (iii) **mögen** sounds less peremptory. It is most often used in the *Konjunktiv II* form *möcht e*: *Frau Hempel sagte ihm, er möchte sie morgen im Büro anrufe n*. The *Konjunktiv I* form *möge* is also found in the most formal registers. Elsewhere it can sound stilted (or possibly facetious):

der junge Kleiderverkäufer, der mich bat, ich möge doch auch bei ihm etwas kaufen (Biehl)	<i>the young clothing salesman who asked me please to buy something from him, too</i>
--	---

14.5 Other uses of the subjunctive

14.5.1 Hypothetical comparisons

(a) Hypothetical comparative clauses: *als ob* and the subjunctive

Clauses expressing a hypothetical comparison are typically introduced by *als ob* in German, corresponding to English ‘as if’. The verbs in them are regularly in

the subjunctive in German.

(i) If the action in the ‘as if’-clause is simultaneous with the action in the main clause, the simple **past subjunctive** is used:

Er tat, als ob er krank wäre	<i>He acted as if he was/were ill</i>
Das Kind weint, als ob es Schmerzen hätte	<i>The child is crying as if it is in pain</i>

The **conditional** can be used if the simple past subjunctive is obsolete or unusual (see 14.2.3), as *bewürb e* would be in the following example:

Sie hatten den Eindruck, als würde sich Diana um die Rolle in einem Kostümfilm bewerben (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>They got the impression that Diana was trying for a part in a period film</i>
--	--

(ii) If the action in the ‘as if’-clause took place before the action in the main clause, the **pluperfect subjunctive** is used:

Sie sieht aus, als ob sie seit Tagen nicht gegessen hätte	<i>She looks as if she hasn't eaten for days</i>
Er tat, als ob nichts passiert wäre	<i>He acted as if nothing had happened</i>

(iii) If the action in the ‘as if’-clause will take place after the action in the main clause, the **conditional** is used:

Es sieht aus, als ob es regnen würde	<i>It looks as if it is going to rain</i>
Es sah aus, als ob er gleich hinfallen würde	<i>It looked as if he was about to fall down</i>

(b) Alternative constructions in hypothetical comparisons

(i) The **ob** of *als ob* can be left out. The finite verb then moves into first position, immediately after *als*:

Er tat, **als wäre** er krank Das Kind weint, **als hätte** es Schmerzen

In practice this is more frequent than *als ob* in writing, but it is very unusual in speech.

(ii) **als wenn** and **wie wenn** are less frequent alternatives to *als ob*:

Er tat, **als wenn/wie wenn** er krank wäre

Das Kind weint, **als wenn/wie wenn** es Schmerzen hätte

(iii) In written German, **Konjunktiv I** can be used if its form is distinct from that of the present indicative. It is less frequent than *Konjunktiv II* even in writing, and some Germans even consider it incorrect:

Er tat, als ob er krank **sei**
Sie sieht aus, als ob sie seit Tagen nicht
gegessen **habe**

Es sah aus, als **werde** er
hinfallen

There is no difference in meaning between using *Konjunktiv I* and *Konjunktiv II* in ‘as if’-clauses.

Konjunktiv I is sometimes used, rather than a conditional (see (a) above), to avoid an obsolete or unusual past subjunctive form (see 14.2.3):

Der Eindruck, als **befände** sich die Partei auf
dem Weg zurück in ihre beschwerliche
Vergangenheit – als **kämpfe** sie nicht für die
Überwindung akuter Probleme (*Zeit*)

*The impression that the party was
on the way back to its problematic
past, that it wasn’t fighting to
overcome immediate problems*

The *Konjunktiv II* form *kämpfte* is not distinguishable from the past indicative, and so the writer has preferred to use *Konjunktiv I* – although s/he **did** use the past subjunctive *befände* earlier in the same sentence.

(iv) In spoken German the **indicative** is commonly used in ‘as if’-clauses. The indicative is at least as frequent as the subjunctive in spoken German, especially in the North (Austrians consider it a ‘Prussianism’) but it is much less common in writing.

Er tat, als ob er krank **war**

Es ist mir, als ob ich hinfallen

Sie sieht aus, als ob sie seit Tagen nicht
gegessen **hat**

werde

14.5.2 Clauses of purpose

(a) Clauses with *damit* 'so that' sometimes have a verb in the subjunctive

Konjunktiv I or *Konjunktiv II* is used without any difference in meaning:

Konstantin musste als Erster über den Graben, um die Flinte in Empfang zu nehmen, damit sie nicht womöglich mir ins Wasser fiel (Dönhoff)	<i>Konstantin had to cross the ditch first to take hold of the shotgun so that I shouldn't drop it into the water</i>
Einmal schickte Dionysos dem Aristippos drei Mädchen, damit er sich eine davon als Geliebte aussuchen könne (SZ)	<i>Dionysus once sent three girls to Aristippos so that he could choose one of them as a lover</i>

This usage is typical of elevated registers and can sound rather old-fashioned. The indicative is nowadays more frequent in all registers, e.g.:

Ich habe ihm auch Bücher gebracht, damit er sich nicht langweilte und nicht immer gezwungen war , an seine Verschwörungen zu denken (Bergengruen)	<i>I brought him some books too, so that he didn't get bored and wasn't always compelled to be thinking of his plots</i>
--	--

The modal verbs **können** and **sollen** are often used in *damit* -clauses, especially (but not only) in spoken German, e.g.:

Dieses Jahr vermietete ein Hausbesitzer einen Teil des Dachs an einen Mobilfunkbetreiber, damit dieser dort eine Antenne aufstellen konnte (MM)	<i>This year a house-owner rented out part of his roof to a mobile telephone company, so that it could set up an aerial there.</i>
---	--

(b) The conjunction *auf dass* ‘so that’

auf dass is an alternative to *damit*. It sounds archaic and solemn and is usually followed by a subjunctive (usually *Konjunktiv I* if the form is unambiguous):

Der Häuptling eines Eingeborenenstammes verfluchte sie, auf dass ihnen nichts von allem, was sie dem Boden und den Gewässern abgewinnen würde, je zum Nutzen gereiche (<i>Spiegel</i>)	<i>The chief of a native tribe cursed them, that they might never derive benefit from anything they gained from the soil or the waters</i>
--	--

14.5.3 *Konjunktiv II* can moderate the tone of an utterance

Konjunktiv II can sound less blunt than the indicative and is often used to tone down an assertion, a statement, a request or a question. This usage is very frequent, especially in spoken German, and the conditional is often used in similar contexts with a similar effect in English. The simple past subjunctive of the common verbs is used, or the conditional form of others:

Ich wüsste wohl, was zu tun wäre Eine Frage hätte ich doch noch Da wäre er nun aufgewacht Ich würde auch meinen , dass es jetzt zu spät ist Diese Sache hätten wir also geregelt Das wär's für heute Hätten Sie sonst noch einen Wunsch? Würden Sie bitte das Fenster zumachen ? Könnten Sie mir bitte sagen, wie ich zum Bahnhof komme?	<i>I think I know what's to be done There's one more thing I'd like to ask He seems to have woken up It seems a little late to me, too We would appear to have sorted that out I think that's enough for today Is there anything else you would like? Would you be so kind as to shut the window? Could you please tell me how to get to the station?</i>
--	---

14.5.4 *Konjunktiv II* in time clauses

Konjunktiv II is sometimes used in time clauses introduced by **bis**, **bevor** or **ehe**. The use of the subjunctive in these clauses is restricted to formal written German and is an optional (and much less usual) alternative to the indicative. It can stress that it was still in doubt whether the action or event in question would or did actually take place:

Sie beschlossen zu warten, bis er käme	<i>They decided to wait till he came</i>
Er weigerte sich, den Vertrag zu unterzeichnen,	<i>He refused to sign the contract</i>
bevor wir ihm weitere Zugeständnisse gemacht	<i>before we had made further</i>
hätten	<i>concessions</i>

14.5.5 *Konjunktiv II* in negative contexts

Konjunktiv II can be used in contexts where an event, action or state was possible, but in fact did not take place or was not the case. The indicative is almost always a possible alternative, especially in speech, but it can sound less tentative. Such contexts are:

(a) After the conjunctions **nicht dass**, **ohne dass** and **als dass**

Nicht, dass er faul wäre (<i>or ist</i>), aber er kommt	<i>Not that he's lazy, but he's not</i>
in seinem Beruf nicht voran	<i>getting on in his career</i>
Es wurden auch häppchenweise private Daten	Private data was also collected
gesammelt, angeblich ohne dass das	little by little – allegedly without
Unternehmen davon wüsste (weiß would	the company knowing anything
sound more definite)	about it
Die Auswahl war zu klein, als dass ich mich	<i>The choice was too small for me</i>
hätte schnell entscheiden mögen (<i>Grass</i>)	<i>to have wanted to decide quickly</i>

The set phrase **nicht dass ich (es) wüsste** ‘not that I know of’ is always used in that form, with a subjunctive.

(b) In other subordinate clauses where the main clause and/or the subordinate clause have a negative element

So gab es keine menschliche Tätigkeit, die nicht von Gestank begleitet gewesen wäre (<i>Süßkind</i>)	<i>So there was no human activity which was not accompanied by stench</i>
Es gibt nichts, was schwieriger wäre (<i>or ist</i>), als der Gebrauch des Konjunktivs	<i>There's nothing more difficult than the use of the subjunctive</i>
nicht eine einzige Großstadt, die nicht ihr Gesicht in zwei Jahrzehnten gründlich gewandelt hätte (<i>Zeit</i>) (hat would sound much more positive)	<i>not a single city that has not changed its appearance totally in twenty years</i>

(c) In sentences with *fast* or *beinahe*

In these the pluperfect subjunctive can be used to emphasize that something almost happened, but didn't:

Er wäre (<i>or ist</i>) beinahe hingefallen	<i>He almost fell down</i>
Ich wäre (<i>or bin</i>) fast nicht gekommen	<i>I nearly didn't come</i>
Wir hätten (<i>or haben</i>) das Spiel beinahe gewonnen	<i>We almost won the match</i>

14.5.6 The subjunctive in wishes, instructions and commands

(a) *Konjunktiv I* can be used in the third person to express a wish

In modern German this is largely restricted to set phrases, e.g.:

Gott segne dich/dieses Haus!	<i>God bless you/this house!</i>
Es lebe die Freiheit!	<i>Long live freedom!</i>
Gott sei Dank!	<i>Thank God!</i>
Behüte dich Gott!	<i>God protect you!</i>

The use of the *Konjunktiv I* of *mögen* in wishes, e.g. *Möge er glücklich sein!* ‘May he be happy!’ is archaic.

(b) A conditional clause with *Konjunktiv II* can express a wish

The clause can have the form with or without *wenn*, see 14.3.3a. The wish can be strengthened by adding *doch* and/or *nur* or *bloß* (see 9.1.7e and 9.1.25c):

Wenn er doch nur käme !	<i>If only he would come</i>
Wenn er bloß fleißiger arbeiten würde !	<i>If only he would work harder!</i>
Wenn ich bloß/nur/doch zu Hause geblieben wäre !	<i>If only I'd stayed at home!</i>
Hätte mein Vater doch dieses Haus nie gekauft !	<i>If only my father hadn't bought this house!</i>

(c) The *Konjunktiv I* of *sein* or the *sein*-passive can express a proposition

This usage is typical of technical or mathematical language:

Gegeben sei ein Dreieck ABC	<i>Given a triangle ABC</i>
In diesem Zusammenhang sei nur darauf verwiesen, dass diese Hypothese auf Einstein zurückgeht	<i>In this context we merely wish to point out that this hypothesis goes back to Einstein</i>

In mathematical contexts the indicative is nowadays at least as common as the subjunctive, e.g. *Gegeben ist ein Dreieck ABC*.

(d) *Konjunktiv I* in commands or instructions

As the imperative only has forms for the second person, the subjunctive is used in commands or instructions in the third person and the first person plural (see 14.1.2):

Also, **spielen** wir jetzt Karten!
Im Notfall **wende** man sich an den
Hausmeister!

Well, let's play cards
In case of emergency please apply to the
caretaker

The modal auxiliaries

Six verbs in German are known as the MODAL AUXILIARY verbs:

dürfen	mögen	sollen
können	müssen	wollen

They are ‘**modal**’ verbs because their typical function is to **indicate the attitude of the speaker with regard to what is being said**, expressing ideas like ability, possibility, permission, necessity, obligation and volition. This range of meaning is related to that of the MODAL PARTICLES (see [Chapter 9](#)) and the category of MOOD (see [Chapter 14](#)). They are ‘**auxiliary**’ verbs because they are typically used with other verbs.

The modal auxiliary verbs are all **irregular** (see 10.1.3c), and their forms are given in full in [Table 10.12](#). This chapter explains the **features** and **uses** of the modal auxiliaries:

- The **forms** and **syntactic features** of the modal auxiliary verbs (section 15.1)
- The **individual modal auxiliary verbs**:
 - **dürfen** (section 15.2)
 - **können** (section 15.3)
 - **mögen** (section 15.4)
 - **müssen** (section 15.5)
 - **sollen** (section 15.6)
 - **wollen** (section 15.7)

15.1 The modal auxiliaries: form and syntax

The modal auxiliary verbs have **several features which set them apart from other German verbs**, and from their English equivalents. The most important of these are listed briefly below and explained in the sections indicated:

- Their forms are wholly **irregular** in similar ways (see 10.1.3c and [Table 10.12](#))
- They have a full range of **tense** and **mood** forms (see 15.1.1)
- They are used with a ‘bare’ infinitive, without *zu* (see 11.3.1a and 15.1.2a)
- Their **perfect tenses** are constructed with the **infinitive** (see 11.3.2a and 15.1.2b)

15.1.1 Tense and mood forms

The German modal auxiliaries have a full range of tense and mood forms. In this they differ from the corresponding English verbs (*can, may, must*, etc.), which have at most only a present tense and a past tense (which often has conditional meaning). German *können*, for example, can be used in the future tense:

Er **wird** es morgen nicht machen **können** *He won't be able to do it tomorrow*

English ‘can’ has no future tense, so the paraphrase ‘be able to’ has to be used to refer to the future. Similarly, there is a clear difference in German between the past tense ***konnte***, which means ‘**was able to**’, and the past subjunctive ***könnte***, which means ‘**would be able to**’. English ‘could’, on the other hand, can be used in either sense, depending on the context:

Ich konnte sie gestern nicht besuchen, weil ich keine Zeit hatte	<i>I couldn't visit her yesterday, because I didn't have time</i>
Ich könnte sie morgen besuchen, wenn ich das Auto nehmen dürfte	<i>I could visit her tomorrow if you let me take the car</i>

Because of this, the German modal auxiliaries can seem complex, but they are easier to sort out if the various combinations of tense and mood with a following simple or compound infinitive are treated independently and learned with their usual English equivalents. The examples in sections 15.2 to 15.7 are set out to facilitate this, and [Table 15.1](#) illustrates the various possible combinations with *können*.

[Table 15.1](#) The tenses and moods of *können* with an infinitive

Tense	Infinitive type	Example	
present	+ infinitive	Er kann es machen	<i>He can do it</i>
present	+ perfect	Er kann es gemacht	He can have done it
future	infinitive	Er wird es machen	He will be able to do it
past	+ infinitive	Er konnte es machen	He was able to do it
perfect	+ infinitive	Er hat es machen	He has been able to do it
pluperfect	+ infinitive	Er hatte es machen	He had been able to do it
past subj.	+ infinitive	Er hätte es machen	He could do it
past subj.	+ perfect	Er könnte es machen	He could have done it
pluperf. subj.	infinitive	Er könnte es gemacht	<i>He would have been able to do it</i>
	+ infinitive	Er hätte es machen	
		können	

15.1.2 Constructions with the modal auxiliaries

Further general information on word order with modal verbs is given in 19.1.

(a) The modal auxiliaries are followed by a ‘bare’ infinitive

(see 11.3.1a). This is similar to the typical English equivalents of these verbs, which are not used with ‘to’. As [Table 15.1](#) shows, they can be followed by a simple or a compound infinitive:

Ich kann **schwimmen**
Darf ich **gehen** ?
Sie muss es **gesehen haben**

I can swim
May I go?
She must have seen it

(b) The perfect tenses of modal auxiliaries

In the perfect tenses, the infinitive of the modal verbs is used instead of the past participle:

Wir haben meinen Onkel nicht besuchen
können
Das habe ich ihr versprechen **müssen**
Sie hätte das Buch lesen **sollen**

*We weren't able to visit my
uncle*
I had to promise her that
She ought to have read the book

However, the past participle is used if the modal auxiliary is used on its own, without a following infinitive (see 11.3.2 and 15.1.2e), e.g. *Ich habe es nicht gewollt*.

The use of the past participle if the modal auxiliary is used with a following infinitive, e.g. *Herbert hat arbeiten gemusst*, is not unknown in spoken German, but it is not accepted as standard.

(c) In main clauses the infinitive of the main verb is in final position

Darf ich heute Tennis **spielen** ?
Ich möchte das Buch gern **lesen**

May I play tennis today?
I would like to read that book

In compound tenses, the infinitive of the modal verb comes **after** the infinitive of the main verb at the end of the clause:

Sie wird morgen nicht **kommen**
können
Sie hätte ihrem Mann doch **helfen**

She won't be able to come tomorrow
She really ought to have helped her

sollen

husband

(d) In infinitive clauses, the modal verb follows the infinitive of the main verb

i.e. at the **end** of the infinitive clause, with the infinitive particle *zu* between the main verb and the modal verb:

Es scheint **regnen zu wollen**
Sie gab vor, meine Handschrift **nicht**
lesen zu können

It looks as if it's going to rain
She claimed not to be able to read my
handwriting

(e) In subordinate clauses, the modal verb follows the infinitive of the main verb

i.e. it comes at the end of the clause:

Wenn Sie diesen Ring heute nicht **kaufen**
wollen, ...
Obwohl ich gestern Abend **ausgehen**
durfte, ...
die Frau, die ich **besuchen sollte**

If you don't want to buy this ring
today, ...
Although I was allowed to go out last
night, ...
the woman I ought to visit

If a modal verb is used in a compound tense in a subordinate clause, the tense auxiliary *werden* or *haben* comes **before** the two infinitives:

Obwohl ich ihn morgen **werde** besuchen
können, ...
Es war klar, dass er sich **würde** anstrengen
müssen
Das Buch, das ich **hätte** kaufen sollen,
kostete dreißig Euro
Sie hat mir gesagt, dass sie es **hat** machen
müssen

Although I'll be able to visit him
tomorrow
It was clear that he would have to
exert himself
The book I ought to have bought
cost thirty euros
She told me she had had to do it

A similar order is usual with a **passive infinitive**:

... weil der Vertrag **hätte** überprüft
werden sollen ... *because the contract should have
been checked*

If there are **two modals** in the clause, the finite one may come before **or** after the two infinitives:

... weil sie ihrem Bruder **müsste** helfen
können/
... weil sie ihrem Bruder helfen können } ... because she should be able to help
müsste her brother

In Austrian usage, the tense auxiliary is often placed between the main verb and the modal verb, e.g.:

am Flughafen Wien-Schwechat, wo die Luftraumsperrung von 0.00 Uhr bis 5.00 Uhr dauern hätte sollen (Standard)	<i>at Vienna Schwechat airport, where the airspace closure should have lasted from midnight to 5 a.m.</i>
--	---

This order is quite usual in Austria, but it is not accepted as standard elsewhere.

(f) The omission of the main verb after the modal auxiliaries

The infinitive of the main verb can be left understood and omitted in some contexts:

(i) if the main verb is a **verb of motion**. If there is an adverbial or, very commonly, a separable prefix in the sentence which conveys the idea of movement, a specific verb of motion can be omitted after the modal verb. This usage is very common in everyday speech, but it is found in writing, too:

Wo wollen Sie morgen hin?	<i>Where do you want to go tomorrow?</i>
Ich will nach Frankfurt	I want to go to Frankfurt
Ich sollte zu meinem Onkel	I ought to go to my uncle's

Ich kann heute Abend nicht ins Kino
Sie will ihm nach
Ich möchte jetzt fort

I can't go to the cinema tonight
She wants to go after him
I'd like to leave now

If the modal is at the end of the clause, a separable prefix is written together with it, e.g. *Sie wissen ja, dass Sie jetzt zu Fuß nach Elberfeld zurückmüssen.*

The verb understood is usually *gehen*, *kommen* or *fahren*, as would be the case in the above examples, but other verbs can be omitted if the idea of movement is sufficiently clear from the adverbial or the prefix:

Er wollte über die Mauer [klettern]
Die Strömung war so stark, dass er nicht
bis ans Ufer [schwimmen] konnte

He wanted to climb over the wall
The current was so strong that he
couldn't swim to the bank

The omission of a verb of motion is most common with simple tenses of the modals, but it is frequently found with the future and perfect tenses of *können* and *müssen* (and in the perfect, exceptionally, the past participle of the modal is used):

Er hat ins Geschäft gemusst
Ich glaube schon, ich werde vorbeikönnen

He's had to go to work
I think I'll be able to get past

(ii) if the main verb is **tun**:

Das kann ich nicht
Das darfst/sollst du nicht
Was soll ich damit?
Ich kann nichts dafür
Er kann was

I can't do that
You mustn't/ought not to do that
What am I supposed to do with it?
I can't help it
He is very able

(iii) if the main verb has **just been mentioned**

This often corresponds to English usage. Optionally, *es* can be added to make it clear that a previous phrase is being referred to, see 3.6.1a:

Ich wollte Tennis spielen, aber ich konnte/ durfte (es) nicht	<i>I wanted to play tennis, but I couldn't/wasn't allowed to</i>
Der junge Spieler könnte niemanden erkennen, auch wenn er es wollte	<i>The young player wouldn't be able to recognize anyone even if he wanted to</i>

(iv) in some **idiomatic or colloquial phrases**:

Ich kann nicht mehr [weitermachen]	<i>I can't go on</i>
Was soll das eigentlich [bedeuten]?	<i>What's the point of that?</i>
Sie hat nicht mehr gewollt	<i>She didn't want to go on</i>
Er kann mich [am Arsch lecken] (<i>vulg.</i>)	<i>He can kiss my ass</i>
Mir kann keiner [was antun]	<i>No-one can touch me</i>
Dürfen wir Pommes [haben]?	<i>Can we have chips/fries?</i>

(g) In German two modals can be used in the same sentence

This is quite different to standard English, which does not permit two modal verbs to occur in the same sentence:

Rechnen muss doch jeder können	<i>But everyone has to be able to add up</i>
Wir müssten hier spielen dürfen	<i>We should be allowed to play here</i>
Wie kannst du das nur machen wollen ?	<i>How can you want to do that?</i>

15.2 dürfen

15.2.1 dürfen most often expresses permission

(a) In this sense *dürfen* corresponds to English 'be allowed to' or 'may'

They may/can come in

Sie dürfen hereinkommen	{	<i>They are allowed to come in</i>
Sie durfte ausgehen, wenn sie wollte		<i>She was allowed to go out when she</i>
Endlich durfte er die Augen wieder aufmachen		<i>wanted to</i> <i>At last he could open his eyes again</i>
Sie wird erst heute Nachmittag mit uns spielen dürfen		<i>She won't be allowed to play with us</i> <i>till this afternoon</i>

In English, 'can' often expresses permission and is often preferred to 'may', which can sound affected. *können* is sometimes heard for *dürfen* in everyday speech in this sense (see 15.3.4), but it is less common than English 'can'.

(b) Negative *dürfen* has the sense of English 'must not'

i.e. it expresses a prohibition (= 'not be allowed to'):

Sie dürfen nicht hereinkommen	{	<i>They mustn't come in</i> <i>They're not allowed to come in</i>
Aber ich darf mich nicht loben (Langgässer)		<i>But I mustn't praise myself</i>
Wir dürfen es uns nicht zu leicht machen (Brecht)		<i>We mustn't make it too easy for</i> <i>ourselves</i>

nicht müssen usually means 'doesn't have to', 'needn't', not 'mustn't', see 15.5.1c.

(c) *Konjunktiv II* forms of *nicht dürfen*

These often correspond to English 'shouldn't', 'ought not to', but *dürfen* keeps its basic sense of permission in such contexts and thus sounds more incisive than *sollen*, see 15.6.4a:

Das dürfte sie doch gar nicht wissen	<i>She ought not to know that</i> (i.e. it shouldn't be allowed)
---	---

Er **hätte** so etwas **nicht**
machen **dürfen**

*He ought not to have done anything like that (i.e.
someone should have forbidden it)*

(d) *dürfen* is commonly used in polite formulas

In these, it usually corresponds to English ‘can’, with the tone of a polite request or a tentative suggestion:

Das **darf** als Vorteil betrachtet werden
Was **darf** sein? (in a shop or restaurant)

That can/may be seen as an advantage

How can/may I help you?

Der Wein **dürfte** etwas trockener sein

The wine could just be a bit drier

Dürfte ich Sie um das Salz bitten?

Could I ask you to pass the salt?

Wir freuen uns, Sie hier begrüßen zu
dürfen

*We are pleased to be able to welcome you
here*

15.2.2 *dürfen* can express probability

The *Konjunktiv II* of *dürfen* expresses an assumption that something is likely:

Das **dürfte** reichen
Manchester United **dürfte** unser bisher
schwerster Gegner in der Champions
League werden
Das **dürfte** ein Vermögen gekostet
haben

That will probably be enough
Manchester United will probably be our
most difficult opponent so far in the
Champions League
That'll have cost a fortune

This sense of *dürfen* is very close to that of the future tense with *werden* (see 12.3.2), or that of the modal particle *wohl* (see 9.1.34).

15.3 *können*

15.3.1 *können* most often expresses ability

Its usual English equivalents are 'can' or 'be able to':

Sie kann ihn heute besuchen	<i>She can/is able to visit him today</i>
Ich konnte sie gestern nicht besuchen	<i>I couldn't visit her yesterday/I wasn't</i>
Ich habe sie gestern nicht besuchen können	<i>able to visit her yesterday</i>
Ich werde sie morgen besuchen können	<i>I'll be able to visit her tomorrow</i>
Ich könnte sie morgen besuchen, wenn ich Zeit hätte	<i>I could visit her tomorrow if I had time</i>
Ich hätte sie gestern besuchen können , wenn ich Zeit gehabt hätte	<i>I would have been able to/could have visited her yesterday, if I'd had time</i>

15.3.2 *können* can express possibility

(a) In this sense *können* usually corresponds to English 'may'

Das kann sein	<i>That may be</i>
Ich kann mich irren	<i>I may be wrong</i>
Er kann krank sein	<i>He may be ill</i>

However, the use of *können* to express possibility is limited. In general *können* can only be used in this sense in contexts where it cannot possibly be understood to mean 'be able to'. Thus, *Sie kann ihn heute besuchen* can only mean 'She is able to visit him today'. In such contexts one of the other ways of expressing 'may' in German given in (b) below has to be used.

Using *können* to express possibility is most often an option:

(i) with a perfect or passive infinitive:

Er kann den Schlüssel verloren haben	<i>He may have lost the key</i>
Die Straße kann gesperrt sein	<i>The road may be blocked</i>
Er kann krank gewesen sein	<i>He may have been ill</i>

(ii) in the *Konjunktiv II* form *könnte* (= English ‘might’ or ‘could’), to indicate a remote possibility:

Sie könnte jetzt in Wien sein	<i>She might/could be in Vienna now</i>
Wir hätten umkommen können	We might/could have been killed
Er könnte krank sein	He might/could be ill
Er könnte krank gewesen sein	<i>He might/could have been ill</i>

(iii) *könnte* can also be used to express a **tentative request** (see 14.5.3):

Könnten Sie mir bitte helfen? *Could you please help me?*

(b) Other German equivalents for English ‘may’, ‘might’

Since *können* can only be used in the sense of possibility in contexts where it cannot be understood to mean ‘be able to’, we often need to express the idea of possibility in German in other ways, i.e.:

(i) with the adverbs *vielleicht* or *möglicherweise*, or a paraphrase (e.g. *Es ist möglich, dass ...*). Compare the following possibilities for English ‘He may be working in the garden’:

Vielleicht arbeitet er im Garten

Es **ist möglich**, dass er im Garten arbeitet

Möglicherweise arbeitet er im Garten

Er kann im Garten arbeiten can only mean ‘He is able to work in the garden’.

(ii) In sentences with a negative, the same alternatives can be used, or the sense of possibility can be made clear by adding *auch* to *nicht können* (see 9.1.4), especially if you are contradicting something just said. *nicht* is stressed in these contexts:

Sie kann auch nicht kommen	}	<i>She may not come</i>
Möglicherweise kommt sie nicht		
Er kann auch nicht krank gewesen sein		

Vielleicht ist er gar nicht krank gewesen } *He may not have been ill*

Sie kann das Auto auch nicht gesehen	}	<i>She may not have seen the</i>	
haben			<i>car</i>
Vielleicht hat sie das Auto gar nicht			
gesehen			

15.3.3 *können* in the meaning 'know'

i.e. to 'know' something you have learned. This applies especially to languages, school subjects, the rules of games, etc. In practice, *können* is a full verb in these contexts, not an auxiliary, and is used without a following infinitive:

Er kann Spanisch	<i>He can speak Spanish</i>
Ich kann die Melodie der	<i>I know the tune of the Austrian national</i>
österreichischen Nationalhymne	<i>anthem</i> (i.e. 'I've learnt it')
Kann der Manfred Skat?	<i>Does Manfred know how to play Skat?</i>
Ich kann den Trick	<i>I know that trick</i> (i.e. 'I can do it'. Compare <i>Ich</i>
	<i>kenne den Trick</i> 'I've seen it before')

15.3.4 *können* used to express permission

i.e. in the sense of *dürfen* (see 15.2.1). This usage is colloquial:

Kann ich herein?	<i>Can I come in?</i>
Du kannst den Bleistift behalten	<i>You can keep the pencil</i>

However, even in colloquial German *können* is less frequent to express permission than is 'can' in English.

15.3.5 English 'can' with verbs of sensation

können is used much less often than English 'can' with verbs of sensation, such

as ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘feel’ and ‘smell’. These are often used with ‘can’ in English without any real idea of being able, but in practice to make up for the fact that these verbs cannot normally be used in progressive tenses to express a continuous action. In this way, ‘I can see it/hear it’ is used because we cannot say ‘I am seeing it/hearing it’. *können* is not needed in German unless the idea of ability is being emphasized:

Ich sehe die Kirche	<i>I can see the church</i>
Ich höre Musik	I can hear music
Sie sahen die Stadt im Tal liegen	<i>They could see the town lying in the valley</i>

15.3.6 English ‘I couldn’t help ...’

There are a number of alternative possibilities in German for this construction, e.g. for English ‘I couldn’t help laughing’:

- (i) Ich musste einfach lachen
- (ii) Ich konnte nicht anders, ich musste lachen
- (iii) Ich konnte nichts dafür, ich musste lachen

- (iv) Ich konnte nicht umhin zu lachen

Alternative (i) is the simplest and most usual in speech, although (ii) and (iii) are quite current. Alternative (iv) is restricted to formal registers.

15.3.7 *könnte* ... gemacht haben and hätte ... machen können

These constructions have different meanings in German. The English equivalents for both are ‘could have done’ or ‘might have done’, but German makes distinctions which we ignore in English, e.g.:

Sie könnte den Brief nicht geschrieben haben	<i>She couldn’t have written the letter</i> (i.e. it couldn’t have been her who wrote it)
Sie hätte den Brief nicht	<i>She couldn’t have written the letter</i> (i.e. she

schreiben können	wouldn't have been able to)
Er könnte umgekommen sein	<i>He might have been killed</i> (i.e. it is possible that he was killed)
Er hätte umkommen können	<i>He might have been killed</i> (i.e. it was possible, but he wasn't)

15.4 mögen

15.4.1 mögen most often expresses liking

This is by far the most common use of *mögen* in present-day German

(a) It is most frequent in the *Konjunktiv II* form *möchte*

This expresses a polite request and usually corresponds to English 'would like' or 'want'. It is often linked with the adverb *gern*:

Sie möchte (gern) nach Rom fahren	<i>She would like to go to Rome</i>
Ich möchte nichts mehr davon hören	I don't want to hear any more about it
Ich möchte ihr Gesicht gesehen haben	I would have liked to see her face
Ich möchte nicht, dass er heute kommt	<i>I don't want him to come today</i>

The pluperfect subjunctive is also used occasionally in this sense, e.g.:

Baldini hätte ihn erwürgen mögen (Süßkind)	<i>Baldini would have liked to strangle him</i>
---	---

In general, though, German more often simply uses *gern* with the pluperfect subjunctive of the verb, e.g., for 'I would have liked to read the book', *Ich hätte gern dieses Buch gelesen*.

(b) Other tenses of *mögen* are used in the sense of English ‘like’

(i) As a full verb, on its own, it occurs most often (although not exclusively) in the negative, chiefly with reference to people, places and food:

Sie mag keinen Tee	<i>She doesn't like tea</i>
Ich mag ihn nicht	I don't like him
Sie hat ihn nie gemocht	She never liked him
Meine Frau hat extra Apfelkuchen gebacken, den mit dem dicken Rahm, den Sie so gern mögen (<i>Balden</i>)	<i>My wife has baked apple cake especially, the one with the thick cream which you like so much</i>

(ii) With a following infinitive it is only used in the negative:

Wie es im Winter werden soll, daran mag er noch gar nicht denken (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>He doesn't want to think about what it's going to be like in winter</i>
Ich mag das Wort gar nicht aussprechen	I don't even like saying that word out loud
Ich mag diese Fragen nicht beantworten (<i>BILD</i>)	I don't want to answer these questions
Er mochte nicht allein an der Straße stehen (<i>Johnson</i>)	<i>He didn't want to stand on the street alone</i>

15.4.2 *mögen* sometimes expresses possibility or probability

The use of *mögen* to express possibility is largely limited to formal written registers and set phrases (although it is more widely used in speech in the South). When it is used it tends to express a rather higher degree of probability than *können*, see 15.3.2.

(a) *mögen* typically indicates a reasonable degree of probability

i.e. somewhere between ‘possible’ and ‘probable’:

Sie **mag/mochte** etwa sechzig sein
Die parteipolitischen Attacken der
Opposition **mögen** auch eine Rolle gespielt
haben (MM)

She is/was probably about sixty
The party political attacks of the
opposition probably also played a
part

An einem Sonntag im März – es **mochte**
etwa ein Jahr seit seiner Ankunft in Grasse
vergangen sein (Süßkind)

*On a Sunday in March – a year or
so had probably gone by since his
arrival in Grasse*

(b) When indicating possibility *mögen* often has a concessive sense

i.e. there is an expected qualification by a following *aber* (which may or may not be present). This usage is similar to English ‘That may well be (, but ...)’:

Das **mag** vielen nicht einleuchten,
(aber ...)

That may not be clear to many, (but ...)

Das Tief **mag** über Italien
weiterwandern und den Balkan
einnässen. Wir aber fliegen dorthin,
wo die Sonne scheint (Grzimek)

The low may drift over Italy and make
the Balkans wet. But we’re flying to
where the sun shines

Eine Zeitlang **mochte** es scheinen,
dass es gelänge, das Absinken der
deutschen Währung abzubremsen,
doch schien es nur so (Heuss)

*For a time it might have appeared that
the attempt to stop the German currency
falling would be successful, but that
appearance was deceptive*

(c) Idiomatic phrases with *mögen* expressing possibility

These are common phrases which are used in spoken German as well as in formal writing:

Das mag (wohl) sein
Wer mag das (schon) sein?
Wie mag das (nur) gekommen sein?

That may well be
Who can that be?
How can that have happened?

A few phrases with *möchte* convey a **doubt** or a supposition:

Ich möchte meinen, dass ...
Dabei möchte man verrückt werden

*I should think that ...
It's enough to drive you mad*

könnte can be used for *möchte* in contexts like these, but it sounds rather less tentative.

15.4.3 *mögen* in concessive clauses

i.e. the German equivalent of English clauses like ‘whatever/whoever that may be’, etc. (see also 17.6.2a). *mögen* is often used in these clauses, especially in writing:

Wann er auch ankommen mag, ...
Was auch immer geschehen mag, ...
Wer er auch sein mag, ...

*Whenever he may arrive ...
Whatever happens ...
Whoever he may be ...*

Alternatively, the main verb can simply be used on its own, and in practice this is more frequent in less formal registers, especially in spoken German:

Wann er auch **ankommt**, ... Was auch immer **geschieht**, ... Wer er auch **ist**, ...

However, *mögen* is always used in the set phrase *Wie dem auch sein mag* ‘However that may be’.

15.4.4 *mögen* in wishes and commands

(a) *Konjunktiv I* of *mögen* can express a wish or a command in the third person

Möge er glücklich sein!
Die Herren **mögen** bitte unten

*May he be happy!
Would the gentlemen be so kind as to wait*

warten

downstairs?

This usage is limited to formal German and sounds old-fashioned, see 14.1.2b.

(b) The subjunctive of *mögen* is used in indirect commands

Sagen Sie ihr, sie **möchte** zu mir kommen
Er sagte mir, ich **möchte** einen Augenblick
auf ihn warten

*Ask her to be kind enough to come
and see me
He asked me to wait for him a
moment*

The *Konjunktiv I* of *mögen* (e.g. ..., sie **möge** zu mir kommen) is also used in indirect commands in formal registers. For further details, see 14.4.4b.

15.5 *müssen*

15.5.1 *müssen* most often expresses necessity or compulsion

(a) The usual English equivalents are ‘must’ or ‘have (got) to’

Wir **müssen** jetzt abfahren
Wir **werden** bald abfahren **müssen**

*We must leave now/We have (got) to
leave now
We’ll have to leave soon*

Ich **musste** um acht abfahren
Ich **habe** um acht abfahren **müssen** }

I had to leave at eight

Ich **muss** den Brief bis heute Abend
geschrieben haben

*I’ve got to have the letter written by
tonight*

Wir **mussten** die Anträge bis zum 15.
Januar **abgegeben haben**

*We had to have the applications handed
in by the 15th of January*

Sie **muss** sich beeilen, wenn sie den
Zug erreichen will

*She’ll have to hurry if she wants to
catch the train*

(b) ‘need’ is sometimes a more natural English equivalent for *müssen*

This is especially the case with a passive infinitive or a passive equivalent:

Das muss gut überlegt werden	<i>That needs thinking about properly</i>
Man muss sich um sie kümmern	<i>She needs looking after</i>

(c) Negative *müssen* keeps the sense of necessity

It usually has the sense of English ‘needn’t’ or ‘don’t have to’:

Wir müssen noch nicht gehen	<i>We needn’t go yet/We don’t have to go yet</i>
Er hat es nicht tun müssen	<i>He didn’t need to/didn’t have to do it</i>
Du musst nicht hier bleiben, du kannst auch gehen	<i>You don’t need to stay here, you can leave</i>

In practice *nicht brauchen* (see 11.2.4) is at least as frequent as *nicht müssen* in this meaning, e.g. *Du brauchst nicht hier zu bleiben*.

English ‘**mustn’t**’ expresses a **prohibition**, and its usual German equivalent is ***nicht dürfen***, see 15.2.1b. *nicht müssen* is sometimes used in this sense in speech, e.g. *Sie müssen hier nicht parken* ‘You mustn’t park here’, but this is considered to be a non-standard (northern) regionalism.

15.5.2 *müssen* can express a logical deduction

(a) This corresponds to English ‘must’ or ‘have to’

Sie spielt heute Tennis, also muss es ihr besser gehen	<i>She’s playing tennis today, so she must be better</i>
---	--

Das **muss** ein Fehler sein
Sie **muss** den Unfall gesehen haben

That must/has (got) to be a mistake
She must have seen the accident

If *müssen* could be taken in context to express necessity where logical deduction is intended, the meaning can be made clear by using the adverb *sicher* rather than *müssen*, e.g.:

Er ist heute **sicher** in Frankfurt *He must be in Frankfurt today*

Er muss heute in Frankfurt sein would naturally be understood to mean ‘He has to be in Frankfurt today’.

(b) The past tense of *mussen* with a simple infinitive expresses a logical deduction in the past

In such contexts English uses ‘must’ with a compound infinitive:

Er schuftete, dass ihm heiß sein **musste** *He was working hard, so he must have
 (Grass) been hot*

(c) A logical deduction can be queried by *nicht brauchen*

This is commoner than *nicht müsse* *n*, e.g.:

Er war heute nicht im Büro, aber er **braucht nicht** deshalb krank zu sein

He wasn't in the office today, but that doesn't mean to say that he's ill

aber er muss nicht deshalb krank sein would be a less frequent alternative.

(d) A negative logical deduction is expressed by *nicht können*

This corresponds to English ‘can’t’:

Sie spielt heute Tennis, also **kann** sie **nicht** *She's playing tennis today, so she*

krank sein

can't be ill

15.5.3 The *Konjunktiv II* of *müssen*

(a) *müsste* can express a possible compulsion or necessity

In this sense it corresponds to English 'would have to' or 'need to':

Er weiß ja nicht, was er tut – ich **müsste**
ja sonst meine Hand von ihm
zurückziehen (*Böll*)

*He doesn't know what he's doing –
otherwise I would have to disown him*

Es sind Felsen, Gestein, wahrscheinlich
vulkanisch, das **müsste** man nachsehen
und feststellen (*Frisch*)

*They are rocks and stones, probably
volcanic, that would need to be
checked and established*

In negative sentences the *Konjunktiv II* of *nicht brauchen* is more usual than that of *nicht müsse n*, see 15.5.2c:

Du hättest **nicht** hinzugehen **brauchen**,
wenn ...

*You wouldn't have had to go there
if ...*

(b) *müsste* can express a logical probability or necessity

In this sense, 'should' or 'ought to' are the usual English equivalents:

Deutschlands Kohle ist teurer, als sie
sein **müsste** (*Zeit*)

*Coal in Germany is dearer than it ought
to be/ should be*

Das **müsste** eigentlich reichen

That really ought to be enough

Ich **hätte** mich vielleicht anders
ausdrücken **müssen**

*Perhaps I ought to/should have expressed
myself differently*

This sense of *müsste* is close to that of *sollte*, which also corresponds to English 'should' or 'ought to', see 15.6.4. There is a difference, though, as *sollte* always

expresses an **obligation** (often laid on a person by someone else), whereas **müsste** expresses a **logical probability or necessity**. Compare:

Sie sollte heute im Büro sein	<i>She ought to be at the office today</i>
(i.e. she is obliged to be if she doesn't want to get into trouble)	
Sie müsste heute im Büro sein	<i>She ought to be at the office today</i>
(i.e. I assume that is the most likely place for her to be)	
Das hätte er eigentlich wissen sollen	<i>He ought to have known that</i>
(i.e. he was obliged to – it could have stopped him making a mistake)	
Das hätte er eigentlich wissen müssen	<i>He ought to have known that</i>
(i.e. I would have thought it was a pretty fair assumption that he did)	
Wo ist der Brief? Er müsste in dieser Schublade sein	<i>Where's the letter? It ought to be/should be in this drawer</i>
(A logical deduction: <i>sollte</i> is not possible, as there can be no obligation on a letter to be in a particular drawer)	

müsste nicht is not normally used as an equivalent for English 'shouldn't' or 'ought not to'; we usually find **sollte nicht** or **dürfte nicht**, see 15.2.1c and 15.6.4.

(c) **müsste ... gemacht haben and hätte ... machen müssen**

The English equivalent for both these constructions is usually 'should/ought to have done', but there is often a distinction between them in German. Compare, for English *He ought to have written the letter yesterday*:

Er müsste den Brief schon gestern geschrieben haben	(i.e. it is a fair deduction that he did)
Er hätte den Brief schon gestern schreiben müssen	(i.e. one might assume that he did, but he didn't)

15.6 *sollen*

15.6.1 *sollen* most often expresses an obligation

(a) This corresponds to ‘be to’, ‘be supposed to’ or (in a few special contexts) ‘shall’

Um wie viel Uhr soll ich kommen?	<i>What time am I to/shall I come?</i>
Ich soll nicht so viel trinken	I’m not supposed to drink so much
Was soll ich in Greifswald tun?	What am I (supposed) to do in Greifswald?
Sie wusste nicht, was sie tun sollte	She didn’t know what to do
Wir sollten uns gestern treffen	<i>We were (supposed) to meet yesterday</i>

The meaning of *sollen* is close to that of *müssen*, and ‘must’, ‘have to’ is often a possible English equivalent. However, *sollen* always conveys the idea that some other person is making an obligation. Compare:

Ich soll hier bleiben	<i>I am to/have (got) to stay here</i> (i.e. someone’s told me to)
Ich muss hier bleiben	<i>I’ve got to stay here</i> (i.e. I need to)

In questions, the past tense of *sollen* can be used to prompt a strong reaction (negative or positive, depending on the context). It can sound ironic:

Wie sollte ich das wissen?	<i>How was I (supposed) to know that?</i>
Sollte das nun fertig sein?	<i>Is that supposed to be finished?</i> (ironic)
Sollte er wirklich nichts davon wissen?	<i>Is he really supposed not to know anything about it?</i>

(b) *sollen* often has the force of a command

See also 14.1.3e. This use is related to the basic sense of obligation:

Du **sollst** nicht stehlen

Du sollst das Fenster zumachen	<i>Thou shalt not steal</i> (I want you to) shut the window
Man soll sofort den Saal verlassen	Everyone has to leave the room immediately Let that be a warning to you
Das soll dir eine Warnung sein	<i>He is to/has got to come at once/Tell him to come at once</i>
Er soll sofort kommen	

sollen is the most frequent modal auxiliary in indirect commands (see 14.4.4b):

Sie sagte ihm, er solle/sollte unten warten	<i>She told him to wait downstairs</i>
Ich habe ihm gesagt, er soll seinem Vater helfen	<i>I told him to help his father</i>

15.6.2 *sollen* can express an intention or prediction

(a) In this sense *sollen* corresponds to ‘be to’, ‘be supposed/meant to’

In London soll bald ein neuer Terminal gebaut werden	<i>A new terminal is to be built soon in London</i>
Soll das ein Kompliment sein?	Is that meant as a compliment?
Es sollte eine Überraschung sein	It was intended to be a surprise
Was soll das heißen?	What’s that supposed to mean?
Es soll nicht wieder vorkommen	It won’t happen again
Das sollst du noch bereuen	<i>You’re going to regret that</i>

(b) The sense of intention is common in first person plural questions

In such contexts *sollen* is an alternative to *wollen*, although there is a slight difference of meaning, see 15.7.1b. Whereas *sollen* leaves the decision entirely to the other person(s), *wollen* in the same context would indicate that the speaker is in favour:

Was **sollen wir** uns heute in Berlin
ansehen?
Sollen wir heute Abend ins Kino
gehen?

*What are we going to look at in Berlin
today?
Shall we go to the cinema tonight?*

(c) The past tense of *sollen* can indicate what was destined to happen

This sense is essentially that of a ‘future-in-the-past’:

Diese Meinung **sollte** sie noch oft zu hören
bekommen
Er **sollte** früh sterben
Er **sollte** niemals nach Deutschland
zurückkehren

*She would often hear this opinion
again
He would/was (destined) to die
young
He would never return to
Germany*

In these contexts *sollte* differs slightly from *würde* (see 14.2.3c), since it indicates that this is a prediction by the speaker.

15.6.3 *sollen* can express a rumour or report

i.e. ‘It is said that ...’. Only the present tense of *sollen* is used in this sense, with a compound infinitive to refer to past time if necessary:

Er soll steinreich (gewesen) sein	<i>He is said to be (have been) enormously rich</i>
Bei den Unruhen soll es bisher vier Tote gegeben haben (FAZ)	<i>So far four people are reported to have been killed in the course of the riots</i>
Das Auto soll eine rote Ampel überfahren haben (MM)	<i>The car is reported to have gone through a red light</i>

15.6.4 The *Konjunktiv II* of *sollen*

(a) The *Konjunktiv II* of *sollen* conveys the idea of a possible obligation

sollte or *hatte ... sollen* are thus the commonest equivalents of English ‘should (have)’, ‘ought to (have)’:

Warum sollte ich denn nicht ins Theater gehen?	<i>Why shouldn't I go to the theatre?</i>
Das solltest du mal probieren	You ought just to try that
Das sollte ihm inzwischen klar geworden sein	He ought to have realized that by now
Das hätten Sie mir aber gestern sagen sollen	<i>You ought to have told me that yesterday</i>

For negative ‘shouldn’t’, ‘ought not to’, *dürfte nicht* can be used as a more incisive alternative to *sollte nicht*, see 15.2.1c.

For the distinction between *sollte* and *müsste* as equivalents of English ‘should’/‘ought to’, see 15.5.3b.

(b) *sollte ... gemacht haben* and *hätte ... machen sollen*

The English equivalent for both these constructions is usually ‘should’/‘ought to have done’, but German can make a distinction between them. Thus, for English ‘She ought to have written the letter yesterday’:

Sie sollte den Brief gestern geschrieben haben (i.e. I would expect her to have done so)
Sie hätte den Brief gestern schreiben sollen (i.e. she ought to have done, but she didn't)

(c) In questions, the *Konjunktiv II* of *sollen* is often used as an alternative to *können*

There is no significant difference in meaning:

Wie sollte/könnte ich das wissen?	<i>How could I know that?</i>
Wie hätte ich das wissen sollen/können ?	How could I have known that?
Warum sollte/könnte er nicht einmal in London gewesen sein?	<i>Why shouldn't he have been to London some time?</i>

(d) *sollte* is often used in conditional sentences and clauses of purpose

- (i) In conditional sentences it corresponds to 'should' or 'were to', see 14.3.1d:

Wenn/Falls es regnen sollte , so komme ich nicht	<i>If it should rain, I shan't/won't come</i>
Sollten Sie ihn sehen, dann grüßen Sie ihn bitte von mir	<i>If you were to see him, please give him my regards</i>

- (ii) *sollen* is often used in clauses of purpose with *damit* (see 17.5.1a):

Ich trat zurück, damit sie mich nicht sehen sollten	<i>I stepped back, so that they shouldn't see me</i>
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For alternative usage in clauses of purpose see 14.5.2.

15.7 *wollen*

15.7.1 *wollen* most often expresses desire or intention

- (a) In many contexts it expresses a wish

(i) It usually corresponds to English 'want/wish (to)':

Sie will ihn um Geld bitten	<i>She wants to ask him for money</i>
Sie wollte ihn um Geld bitten	} <i>She wanted to ask him for money</i>
Sie hat ihm um Geld bitten wollen	
Hättest du kommen wollen ?	<i>Would you have wanted to come?</i>
Willst du nicht deinem Vater helfen?	<i>Don't you want to help your father?</i>

(ii) In this sense, *wollen* is often used without a dependent infinitive, as a full verb:

Was wollen Sie von mir?	<i>What do you want from me?</i>
Der Arzt will , dass ich mehr Bewegung mache	The doctor wants me to take more exercise
Mach, was du willst	<i>Do what you like</i>

(iii) The sense of 'wish' is often given by *Konjunktiv II* to stress that the wish isn't or wasn't fulfilled:

Ich wollte , ich hätte sie nicht so beleidigt	<i>I wish I hadn't offended her so much</i>
Ich wollte , ich wäre zu Hause	<i>I wish I was at home</i>

(iv) *wollen* can correspond to English 'will', 'would':

Er will es nicht zugeben	<i>He won't admit it</i>
Ich bat sie, es zu tun, aber sie wollte nicht	I asked her to do it, but she wouldn't
Willst du mir helfen? Ja, ich will dir helfen	<i>Will you help me? Yes, I will help you</i>

wollen in this sense is distinct in meaning from the future tense. *Wirst du mir helfen? Ja, ich werde dir helfen* sound more impersonal and lack the sense of active intention which is conveyed by *wollen* and which is closer to English 'want', i.e. 'Do you want to help me? Yes, I want to help you'.

(v) *wollen* is common in second person questions with the sense of an insistent request:

Willst du bitte noch mal nachsehen?	<i>Will you have another look, please?</i>
Wollen Sie bitte die Frage wiederholen?	<i>Will you repeat the question, please?</i>

In requests like these, the conditional (i.e. **Würden** Sie bitte noch mal nachsehen?, see 14.5.3) sounds rather less blunt and direct than *wollen*.

(b) *wollen* can express intention

(i) In such contexts it often corresponds to English ‘be going to’, but *wollen* stresses the notion of intention more forcefully than the future with *werden*:

Wir wollen uns bald einen neuen Smart TV anschaffen	<i>We’re going to buy ourselves a new Smart TV soon</i>
--	---

(The future *Wir werden uns bald einen neuen Smart TV anschaffen* sounds less like a definite intention)

Wie wollen Sie ihm das klarmachen?	<i>How are you going to explain that to him?</i>
Ich wollte Sie darüber fragen	<i>I was going to ask you about it</i>
Was wollen Sie damit sagen?	<i>What do you intend by that?</i>
Das will nicht viel sagen	<i>That doesn’t mean much</i>
Ich will sie erst morgen anrufen	<i>I don’t intend phoning her/I’m not going to phone her until tomorrow</i>
Es scheint regnen zu wollen	<i>It looks as if it’s going to rain</i>

(ii) In first person plural questions *wollen* has the sense of English ‘Shall we ...?’:

Wollen wir eine Tasse Kaffee trinken?	<i>Shall we/Let’s have a cup of coffee</i>
Was wollen wir heute machen?	<i>What shall we do today?</i>
Na, dann wollen wir mal (anfangen)?	<i>Well then, let’s get on with it!</i>

sollen is an alternative to *wollen* in such constructions, see 15.6.2b. However,

there is a slight difference in meaning. *wollen* clearly indicates that the speaker is in favour of the proposal, but *sollen* leaves the decision entirely to the other person(s).

(c) With an inanimate subject, *wollen* corresponds to English ‘need’

The sense of *wollen* in these contexts is similar to that in (a) and (b) above, but English ‘want’ and ‘wish’ are not normally used with an inanimate subject:

Tomaten **wollen** viel Sonne
Eine solche Arbeit **will** Zeit haben
Das **will** gut überlegt werden

Tomatoes need a lot of sun
A piece of work like that needs time
That needs proper consideration

Negative *wollen* with an inanimate subject has the sense of ‘refuse’:

Der Koffer **wollte** nicht zugehen
Meine Beine **wollen** nicht mehr
Das **will** mir nicht in den Kopf

The suitcase refused to/wouldn’t close
My legs won’t carry me any further
I can’t grasp that

15.7.2 *wollen* can be used in the sense of ‘claim’

In this sense, *wollen* is usually linked with a perfect infinitive, typically with the implication that the claim is false:

Er **will** eine Villa auf Mallorca **gekauft**
haben

He claims to have bought a villa on
Majorca

Sie **wollen** dich in Berlin **gesehen haben**
eine ehemalige Geliebte, die nichts
gesehen haben **will**, weil sie „schockiert“
war (MM)

They say they saw you in Berlin
a former lover who claims not to have
seen anything because she was
‘shocked’

A few set phrases are an extension of this sense of *wollen*:

Keiner will es getan haben
Ich will nichts gesagt haben
Ich will nichts
gehört/gesehen/gemerkt haben

No-one admits doing it
Go on as if I hadn't said anything
I'll go on as if I hadn't heard/seen/noticed
anything

Verbs: valency

Different verbs need different elements to make a grammatical sentence. The elements which a particular verb needs to form a grammatical sentence are called the **COMPLEMENTS** of the verb, and the type and number of complements required by a particular verb to construct a grammatical sentence make up the **VALENCY** of the verb.

In particular, German typically shows the **relationship** between the **complements** and the **verb** by using **cases** (see [Chapter 2](#)). English noun phrases do not have endings to show case, and the relationship of the complements to the verb is indicated more often by their **position** (see [Chapter 21](#)).

The various sections of this chapter explain the valency and the complements of verbs, with particular emphasis on verbs and constructions in German which are different from their nearest English equivalents.

- verb **valency**, **complements** and **sentence patterns** (section 16.1)
- the **subject** of the verb (section 16.2)
- the **accusative** or **direct object** of the verb (section 16.3)
- verb objects in the **dative** case (section 16.4)
- **prepositional** objects (section 16.5)
- **predicate complements** (section 16.6)

- verb objects in the **genitive** case (section 16.7)
- **locative complements** (section 16.8)

16.1 Valency, complements and sentence patterns

16.1.1 The complements of the verb

The complements of a particular verb are the elements it needs to construct a grammatical sentence. Different verbs need different elements – the action of giving, for instance, involves a person handing a thing over to another person. The verb *geben*, therefore, needs three elements to form a sentence: a **SUBJECT** (in the **nominative** case), a **DIRECT OBJECT** (in the **accusative** case) and an **INDIRECT OBJECT** (in the **dative** case):

Mein Vater (nom.) hat seinem Bruder (dat.) doch das Geld (acc.) gegeben

If we omitted any of these, the sentence would be ungrammatical. Other verbs, like *telefonieren*, only need one element, in this case a **subject**:

Ich habe eben telefoniert *I've just made a phone call*

Many verbs, like *schlagen*, need two, i.e. a **subject** and a **direct object**:

Sie hat den Ball geschlagen *She hit the ball*

Some verbs have other types of construction, for example with a **subject** and a phrase with a particular preposition (a '**prepositional object**'), like *warten*:

Ich habe lange auf dich gewartet *I waited a long time for you*

There are **seven types of complement in German**, as shown in [Table 16.1](#). The most important is the **subject**, which all but a few verbs must have and which is dealt with in 16.2. Full details about the other complements are given in sections 16.3–16.8.

[Table 16.1](#) Verb complements in German

subject	a noun phrase in the nominative case	Der Bäcker trinkt zu viel Hier wächst ein guter Wein Das hast du mir doch versprochen!
accusative object	a noun phrase in the accusative case	Er trinkt schwarzen Tee Sie hat mir diesen Roman empfohlen Diesen Mann sah er in der Stadt
dative object	a noun phrase in the dative case	Sie verkaufte mir einen Laptop Ich habe soben Markus gemailt Ihrem Mann wollte ich helfen
genitive object	a noun phrase in the genitive case	Er bedarf meiner Hilfe Er erinnerte sich des Vorfalls Sie wurde des Mordes angeklagt
prepositional object	a phrase introduced by a preposition determined by the verb	Sie warnte mich vor dem Polizisten Er starb an einer Lungenentzündung Darauf hatte sie lange gewartet
locative complement	a phrase indicating place with a verb of position or direction with a verb of motion	Sie wohnt in Heiligenhafen Gestern ist sie in die Stadt gefahren Er legte das Buch auf den Tisch

predicate complement	a noun phrase in the nominative case or an adjective with a copular verb	Er ist ihr Betreuer Wir sind älter geworden Das Heft war teuer
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16.1.2 Verb valency

Every German verb GOVERNS a specific number of complements of a particular type. *geben*, for instance, as in the example in 16.1.1, has three: a **subject**, an **accusative** or **direct object** and a **dative** or **indirect object**, whereas *telefonieren* has only a subject. The property of each verb to govern a certain number of complements of a particular type is the **VALENCY** of the verb.

We have to know the valency of a German verb to be able to use it correctly. This is sometimes different from the valency of what may seem to be the equivalent English verb:

Das hat er mir gestern mitgeteilt	<i>He informed me of that yesterday</i>
Ich fürchte mich vor dem	I'm afraid of the dentist
Zahnarzt	<i>He advised her against (making) this</i>
Er riet ihr von dieser Reise ab	<i>journey</i>

English-speaking learners need to learn the valency of each verb carefully in order to be able to use it in context. It is good practice to learn German verbs in typical sentences containing them.

A number of verbs, especially the most frequent, are used with different valencies which are often associated with differences in meaning:

jdn. achten	<i>respect somebody</i>
auf jdn. achten	<i>pay attention to somebody</i>

Further examples are given in the remainder of this chapter.

16.1.3 German sentence patterns

All German verbs are used with one, two or three of the complements listed in [Table 16.1](#) to form a grammatical clause or sentence. How many there are, and of what type, makes up the valency of the verb.

There are a limited number of combinations of complements which occur commonly with German verbs, since many verbs have the same valency. In this way, we can say that German possesses a restricted number of possible sentence structure types or SENTENCE PATTERNS (the German term is *Satzbaupläne*). For example, many verbs are *einem etwas* verbs, like *geben*, and need an **accusative object** and a **dative object** besides the **subject**.

The **most frequent sentence patterns** of German are given in [Table 16.2](#). They are explained in the remainder of this chapter under the heading of the individual complements, where some less frequent sentence patterns are also introduced.

[Table 16.2](#) German sentence patterns

subject + verb	Der Mann schwimmt
subject + verb + accusative object	Der Mann kauft den Fernseher
subject + verb + dative object + accusative object	Der Mann gibt seinem Bruder den Fernseher
subject + verb + dative object	Der Mann hilft seinem Bruder
subject + verb + prepositional object	Der Mann wartet auf seinen Bruder
subject + verb + predicate complement	Der Mann ist nett/ein netter Mensch
subject + verb + locative complement	Der Mann fährt in die Stadt

16.1.4 Complements and adverbials

The complements are those elements in a sentence which are linked closely to the verb. However, a sentence can contain other elements:

Mein Vater hat seinem Bruder **gestern** das Geld gegeben

Heute habe ich diesen Mann **in der Stadt** gesehen

Sie wohnte **lange** in Halle

Gestern ging sie **schnell** in die Stadt

Words and phrases like those in bold type provide additional information, often about the time, manner or place of the action or event. They may be important in context, but they are not closely bound up with the basic meaning of the verb like the complements. If we leave them out, the sentence is still grammatical. These elements are ADVERBIALS (in German *freie Angaben*). They can be single words (ADVERBS) or phrases, and they can be classified into types as shown in [Table 7.1](#).

Frequently, **complements are necessary** to make a grammatical sentence, whilst **adverbials can be left out** without the sentence becoming ungrammatical. But the distinction is not always as clear-cut, since certain complements of some verbs can be omitted without the result being an ungrammatical sentence. Compare:

Er trinkt viel Kaffee	Er trinkt	Sie fährt in die Stadt	Sie fährt
------------------------------	-----------	-------------------------------	-----------

The sentences are still grammatical even when the complements in bold are left out. However, the action of *trinken* must involve consuming some liquid (the direct object), and the action of *fahren* always implies going somewhere (the locative complement). These elements are so closely bound up in meaning with the action of the verb that, even if we can leave them out in some contexts, they are implicit in the sentence, and they are complements rather than adverbials. They are not simply extra pieces of information about the circumstances of the action.

The same word or phrase can be a complement in some contexts, but an adverbial in others. Compare:

Sie wohnte in	<i>in Köln</i> is a complement to <i>wohnen</i> ; it cannot be omitted
Köln:	<i>in Köln</i> can be omitted; it is an adverbial adding extra
Sie starb in Köln:	information

16.2 The subject

16.2.1 Most German verbs require a subject

Characteristically, the **subject** of verbs in the active voice is the AGENT, i.e. the animate being carrying out the action, e.g. ***der Räuber** hat das Geld gestohlen*, ***die Studenten** singen*, ***der Bär** frisst das Fleisch*.

(a) The subject is in the nominative case

The finite verb agrees with the subject, see 10.1.4:

Ich reise nach Italien
 Das hat uns **die Geschichte** gelehrt
Wer ruft mich?
 Kommen **deine Geschwister** morgen?

For the use of *es* as a ‘dummy subject’ in order to permit the real subject to occur later, e.g. *Es stand eine alte Frau am Fenster*, see 3.6.2d.

(b) The subject can be a subordinate clause or an infinitive clause

In this case, the verb has the third person singular ending, see 10.1.4a.

Dass du hier bist, freut mich

Dich wiederzusehen hat mich gefreut

Subordinate subject clauses are introduced by *dass* or an interrogative, see 17.2.

For further information on subject infinitive clauses see 11.2.2. If a clause is not in first position in the sentence, it can be anticipated by *es*, e.g. *Es freut mich, dass du hier bist*, see 3.6.2e.

(c) The subject can be ‘understood’ in certain contexts

In German as in English, we can leave out the subject of the verb in some contexts. In particular, if the verbs in two (or more) main clauses linked by the coordinating conjunctions *und* and *oder* (see 17.1) have the same subject, the second (or subsequent subject) is often omitted. We say that the subject is ‘understood’ in the second clause:

Er kam herein und sah seine Frau in der Ecke sitzen	<i>He came in and saw his wife sitting in the corner</i>
Meine Schwester geht oft ins Kino oder besucht ein Konzert	<i>My sister often goes to the cinema or attends a concert</i>

16.2.2 A few verbs do not need a subject

These verbs just have an **accusative** or a **dative object** (depending on the verb), but **no subject**. The verb is in the **third person singular** form, e.g. ***mich hungert***, ***mir bangt***. Most of these verbs express an emotion or a sensation, and almost all are now limited to formal or literary registers, or to regional (especially southern) usage. The following are still used (more frequently used equivalents are given where appropriate):

Mir bangt vor etwas (<i>dat.</i>) (More usual: <i>Ich habe Angst vor etwas</i>)	<i>I am afraid of sth.</i>
Mich dürstet , hungert (More usual: <i>Ich habe Durst, Hunger</i>)	<i>I am thirsty, hungry</i>
Mir (Mich) ekelt vor etwas (<i>dat.</i>)	<i>I am disgusted at sth.</i>
(More usual: <i>Es ekelt mich/Ich ekele mich vor etwas</i> or <i>Etwas ekelt mich</i>)	
Mich friert	<i>I am cold</i>

(More usual: *Es friert mich* or, more colloquially: *Ich friere*)

Mir graut vor jdm./etwas (<i>dat.</i>) (More usual: <i>Es graut mir vor etwas</i>)	<i>I have a horror of sb./sth.</i>
Mich/Mir schaudert vor etwas (<i>dat.</i>) (More usual: <i>Es schaudert mich vor etwas</i>)	<i>I shudder at sth.</i>
Mir (Mich) schwindelt (More usual: <i>Mir ist schwindlig</i>)	<i>I feel dizzy</i>
Mir träumte von etwas (<i>dat.</i>) (More usual: <i>Ich träumte von etwas</i>)	<i>I dreamed of sth.</i>
Mir wundert , dass ...	<i>I am surprised that ...</i>

(Still quite frequent, but there are common alternatives: *Es wundert mich/Ich wundere mich, dass*)

The impersonal constructions with *sein* and *werden* and an adjective linked with the dative of a person experiencing a sensation, e.g. *Mir ist kalt, übel*, etc., are similar to the constructions with these verbs, in particular because they are most often used with the dative in first position and the impersonal subject omitted. For details see 2.5.4c and 16.2.4e.

16.2.3 The subject in German and English: differences

German is more restrictive than English in respect of the noun which can occur as the subject of the verb. In English nouns which do not denote an agent can often be used as the subject of the verb. This is less frequent in German, where the subject of the verb is usually the agent actually performing the action. In such cases, the noun which is the subject in English typically appears in a prepositional phrase in German:

In diesem Hotel sind Hunde verboten	This hotel forbids dogs
In diesem Zelt können vier schlafen	This tent sleeps four
Mit dieser Anzeige verkaufen wir viel	This advertisement will sell us
Wir können mit diesem Prozess nicht fortfahren	<i>a lot</i>
Damit haben wir unseren besten Mittelstürmer verloren	This trial cannot proceed
	This has lost us our best striker

In Berlin wird es wieder ziemlich heiß sein **Berlin** *will be rather hot again*

A thing like a hotel cannot really ‘forbid’. Neither do ‘tents’ actually ‘sleep’ or ‘advertisements’ do any ‘selling’, etc., and, in the last example, Berlin is **where** ‘it’ is hot rather than a person feeling the heat. The German constructions reflect this more clearly than do the corresponding English sentences.

16.2.4 The impersonal subject *es*

Many verbs are exclusively or commonly used impersonally, with the indefinite subject *es* (see also 3.6.2a), which corresponds to English ‘it’ or ‘there’. The *es* can only be omitted in the constructions dealt with in sub-sections (e) and (f) below.

(a) Verbs referring to weather

These verbs are only used impersonally:

Es regnet, hagelt, schneit
Es blitzte
Es dämmert

It is raining, hailing, snowing
There were flashes of lightning
It is growing light/dusk

(b) Verbs used with impersonal *es* to refer to an indefinite agent

These are verbs which **can** be used with a specific subject, but are used impersonally if the agent is vague or unknown:

(i) verbs referring to natural phenomena:

Es zieht
Es brennt
Dort riecht **es** nach Teer

There’s a draught
Something’s burning
There’s a smell of tar there

(ii) verbs denoting noises:

Es läutet, klingelt
Es hat an der Tür geklopft
Es kracht, zischt, knallt

Someone's ringing the bell
There was a knock at the door
There is a crashing, hissing, banging noise

Many other verbs can be used with an impersonal *es* to express the idea of a vague impersonal agent, see 3.6.2a.

(c) Verbs denoting sensations and emotions

Many verbs denoting sensations can be used with an impersonal *es* as subject to give the idea of an unspecified force causing the sensation. The person involved appears as an accusative object:

Es juckt mich
Es überlief mich kalt
Es zog mich zu ihr
Es hält mich hier nicht länger

I itch
A cold shiver ran up my back
I was drawn to her
Nothing's keeping me here any more

Most verbs which can be used without a subject in formal or older German are now more usually constructed like this, e.g. *Es friert mich*, *Es wundert mich*, etc. See 16.2.2 for details.

(d) Impersonal *es* with *sein* or *werden* followed by a noun or an adjective

This usually corresponds to English 'it':

Es ist, wurde spät
Es ist dein Vater

It is, got late
It's your father

Further details on this use of *es* are given in 3.6.2b. The use of *es ist* in the sense of English 'there is/are' is treated in detail in 16.2.5.

(e) The impersonal use of *sein* and *werden* with a dative

sein and *werden* can be used impersonally with a personal dative and some adjectives expressing a sensation:

Es ist mir heiß, kalt, schwindlig, übel, warm, etc.

For details see 2.5.4c. *es* is often left out if it is not in first position in a main clause:

Ist (es) dir kalt? Ja, mir ist (es) kalt
Ich merkte, dass (es) mir schwindlig wurde

(f) Impersonal passive and reflexive constructions

Es lebt sich gut in dieser Stadt	<i>You can live well in this city</i>
Es wurde im Nebenzimmer geredet	<i>People were talking in the next room</i>

es is usually left out unless it is in initial position in a main clause. For details see 3.6.2a and 13.1.3 – 4.

(g) Other impersonal verbs and constructions

Many other verbs can be used in impersonal constructions as well as with a definite subject, and several of these have become frequent idioms:

Es fehlt mir an etwas (*dat.*) (see also
16.4.2d)

Es gefällt mir in Heidelberg (see also
16.4.2d)

Wie geht es (dir/Ihnen)?

Es geht

Es geht um Leben und Tod

Es gilt, etwas zu tun

Es geschah ihm recht

I lack sth.

I like it in Heidelberg

How are you?

It can be done; OK (in answer to *Wie geht es (dir/Ihnen)?*)

It's a matter of life and death

Something must be done

It served him right

Es handelt sich um etwas (<i>acc.</i>)	It is a question of sth.
Es heißt, dass ...	It is said that ...
Es kommt auf etwas (<i>acc.</i>) an	It depends on sth.
Es kommt zu etwas (<i>dat.</i>) e.g. Am Abend	Something occurs e.g. There were
kam es zu neuen Zusammenstößen	fresh clashes in the evening
Es liegt an etwas (<i>dat.</i>) e.g. Woran liegt	It is due to sth. e.g. Why is it that ...?
es, dass ...?	It doesn't matter
Es macht/tut nichts	Things look bad/better for him
Es steht schlecht/besser um ihn	How's she doing?
Wie steht es mit ihr?	<i>Things are like that e.g. Things are</i>
Es verhält sich so e.g. Ähnlich verhält es	<i>similar at the University of Münster</i>
sich an der Universität Münster	

16.2.5 *es ist/sind* and *es gibt*

es ist/sind and *es gibt* are both equivalents of English 'there is/are' but they have rather different meanings.

(a) *es gibt* indicates existence in general

It is a real impersonal construction, and *es* is never omitted. However, it has become so frequently used that, in the form *gibs*, it has almost become an independent word in non-standard colloquial speech, e.g. *da gibts schon mehr als genug*, and it is even heard with another *es*, e.g. *Ich weiß nicht, wo's die gibts*.

In everyday speech in south-west Germany, *es hat* is used for *es gibt*. This is a non-standard regionalism.

(i) *es gibt* is typically used in broad, general statements, denoting existence in general, without necessarily referring to a particular place:

Es gibt Tage, wo alles schief geht	<i>There are days when everything goes</i>
So etwas gibt es nicht	<i>wrong</i>
Es gibt verschiedene Gründe dafür	<i>There's no such thing</i>

Dort hat es schon häufig Ärger gegeben (HMP)	<i>There are various reasons for that There has often been trouble there</i>
---	--

(ii) *es gibt* is used to point in a general way to permanent existence in a large area (i.e. a city or a country):

Es gibt drei alte Kirchen in dieser Stadt	<i>There are three old churches in this town</i>
In Trier gibt es ja so viel zu sehen	<i>There's so much to see in Trier</i>
Es dürfte in der Bundesrepublik wenige geben , die so gut wie er informiert sind (Zeit)	<i>There are probably not many people in the Federal Republic who are as well informed as he is</i>

(iii) *es gibt* records the consequences of some event:

Wenn du das tust, gibt's ein Unglück	<i>If you do that, there'll be an accident</i>
Bei den Unruhen soll es bisher vier Tote gegeben haben (FAZ)	<i>It is reported that there have been four killed in the disturbances so far</i>

(b) *es ist/sind* indicates the presence of something at a particular time and place

The *es* of *es ist/sind* is a 'dummy' subject (see 3.6.2d), which allows the real subject of the verb to occur later in the sentence. It drops out when it is not in initial position in a main clause. Compare:

Es war eine Maus in der Küche	<i>There was a mouse in the kitchen</i>
In der Küche war eine Maus	<i>In the kitchen there was a mouse</i>
Er hat gemerkt, dass eine Maus in der Küche war	<i>He noticed that there was a mouse in the kitchen</i>

es ist/sind is used:

(i) to refer to permanent or temporary presence in a definite and limited place, or temporary presence in a large area:

Es war noch ein kleines Café in der Berliner Straße	<i>There was still a little café in the Berliner Strasse</i>
Es ist irgendjemand an der Tür	<i>There's someone at the door</i>
Es waren noch viele Menschen auf den Straßen	<i>There were still a lot of people in the streets</i>
Es sind keine Wolken am Himmel gewesen	<i>There were no clouds in the sky</i>

Sentences with *es ist/sind* **must** contain an indication of place. This is often quite simply *da*:

Es ist ein Brief für Sie da	<i>There's a letter for you there</i>
---	---------------------------------------

es gibt is sometimes used in contexts like this, but it emphasizes the thing rather than the place and underlines its distinctive character:

In dieser Diele gab es gegenüber der Tür einen offenen Kamin (<i>Wendt</i>)	<i>In this lounge there was an open fireplace opposite the door</i>
---	---

(ii) to record events and when speaking of weather conditions:

Letzte Woche war in Hamburg ein Streik	<i>There was a strike in Hamburg last week</i>
In Mainz war ein Aufenthalt von fünf Minuten	<i>There was a five-minute stop in Mainz</i>
Am nächsten Morgen war dichter Nebel	<i>Next morning there was thick fog</i>
Gestern war ein Gewitter in Füssen	<i>There was a thunderstorm in Füssen yesterday</i>

Usage varies in contexts like this, and *es gibt* is often used without any real difference of meaning:

Letzte Woche **gab es** einen Streik in Hamburg

In Mainz **gab es** einen Aufenthalt von fünf Minuten

Gestern **gab es** ein Gewitter in Füssen

es gibt is particularly frequent when a need is felt to emphasize the exceptional nature of the event or to refer to the future:

Es **gab** eine Explosion in der Fabrik
Morgen **wird es** wieder schönes Wetter
geben

*There was an explosion in the
factory
It will be fine again tomorrow*

[16.3 The accusative object](#)

16.3.1 Transitive verbs govern a direct object in the accusative case

Verbs which govern an accusative object are called **TRANSITIVE VERBS**. This accusative object is known as the **DIRECT OBJECT** of these verbs. With many of these verbs, the direct object is the only complement apart from the subject:

Er hat **sie** besucht

Christian hat **seine Freundin** besucht

Seine Worte haben **mich** verletzt

Den Arzt hat sie nicht gesehen

Many transitive verbs can have other complements in addition to the direct object, in particular:

- a **dative object**: Maria hat **ihrem Freund** den Reiseführer geliehen
- a **prepositional object**: Der Jäger hat die Kinder **vor dem Wolf** gewarnt
- a **locative complement**: Albrecht hat den Besen **in die Ecke** gestellt
- a **genitive object**: Adelheid würdigte ihren Kollegen **keines Blickes**

Details about these other sentence patterns with direct objects are given in the sections dealing with the other relevant complement.

The accusative case is used in some **time** and **place phrases**, e.g. *Es hat den ganzen Tag geschneit*. These are not complements of the verb, but **adverbials**, see 2.2.2.

16.3.2 The direct object can have the form of a clause

(a) Many verbs can have a clause as their direct object

Because these clauses function as complements of the verb, they are called **COMPLEMENT CLAUSES**. These clauses can be:

(i) A **subordinate clause** with *dass*, *ob* or an interrogative (see 17.2):

Ich bedauerte, **dass ich nicht kommen konnte**

Sie fragte mich, **ob ich dort übernachten wollte**

Sie hatte vergessen, **wie man es macht**

(ii) An **infinitive clause** with *zu* (see 11.2.2):

Ich bedauerte **nicht kommen zu können**

Ich hoffe **dich bald wiedersehen zu können**

Ich habe vor **sie morgen zu besuchen**

Many verbs which have a clause as object can have either a subordinate clause or an infinitive clause, like *bedauern* in the examples above. However, a few verbs only allow an infinitive clause (especially verbs denoting an intended action, like *versuchen*, *vorhaben*, *wagen*, *sich weigern*, *zögern*), whereas others only allow a subordinate clause (especially verbs of saying and hearing, e.g. *erleben*, *fragen*, *mitteilen*, *verfügen*). In practice, usage in German is similar to that with the nearest English equivalents. For the main exceptions see 11.2.3.

(b) A direct object clause is sometimes anticipated by *es*

This can be the case whether the complement is a subordinate clause or an infinitive clause, e.g.:

Sie sah **es** als gutes Zeichen an, dass keine Leute mehr vorbeikamen

Ich konnte **es** kaum ertragen, ihn so leiden zu sehen

Details on the use of this ‘anticipatory’ *es* are given in 3.6.2f.

16.3.3 A few verbs are used with two accusative objects

Although the general rule is that only one accusative object is possible in a sentence, there are a few verbs which govern two accusative objects.

A second accusative with verbs of calling, e.g. *Er nannte mich einen gemeinen Schurken* is not an object but a predicate complement in the accusative, see 16.6.2.

(a) *kosten* and *lehren* are normally used with two accusatives

Der Flug hat **meinen Vater 5000 Euro**
gekostet

*The flight cost my father 5000
euros*

Sie hat **mich Deutsch** gelehrt

She taught me German

In colloquial German both these verbs are often used with a dative of the person, e.g. *Sie hat mir Deutsch gelehrt; Das hat mir viel Geld gekostet*. This is not generally considered standard, but it is acceptable with *kosten*, as an alternative to the accusative, in figurative contexts:

Das kann **ihn/ihm** den Hals kosten *That may cost him his life*

(b) *abfragen* and *abhören* ‘test sb. orally’

These verbs can be used **either** with two accusative objects **or** a dative of the person and an accusative:

Der Lehrer hat **ihn/ihm** die englischen
Vokabeln abgefragt/abgehört

*The teacher tested him on his
English vocabulary*

If only the person is mentioned, they are in the accusative: *Der Lehrer hat **ihn**
abgefragt / abgehört*

(c) *bitten* and *fragen* can be used with two accusatives

One denotes the person asked, the other is an indefinite pronoun or a subordinate clause:

Hast du **ihn** etwas gefragt?
Das möchte ich **dich** bitten
Sie fragte **ihn, ob er mitkommen**
wollte

*Did you ask him something?
I would like to request that of you
She asked him if he wanted to come with
her*

bitten is more often used with a prepositional object introduced by *um*, see 16.6.10: *Ich möchte dich darum bitten.*

(d) *angehen* is used with an accusative of the person and an indefinite expression of quantity

Das geht **dich nichts** an *That doesn't concern you at all*

Similarly: *Das geht mich viel/wenig/einen Dreck an.* Using *angehen* with a dative of the person (e.g. *Das geht **dir** nichts an*) is a North German regionalism which is not accepted as standard.

16.3.4 Transitive verbs in German and English: important differences

There are a number of instances where the construction used with some English transitive verbs differs significantly from that used with what seems to be their nearest equivalent in German.

(a) Fewer verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively in German than in English

Many German verbs are less flexible than their nearest English counterparts and more restricted to use in certain constructions only. A few German verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively, e.g.:

Ich brach den Zweig	<i>I broke the branch</i>
Der Zweig brach	The branch broke
Sie rollte den Ball ins Netz	She rolled the ball into the net
Der Ball rollte ins Netz	<i>The ball rolled into the net</i>

Far fewer German than English verbs can be used in this way, which means that many English verbs have two (or more) German equivalents depending on whether the English verb is being used transitively or intransitively. These can take a number of forms:

(i) **Different verbs are used in German** for the transitive and intransitive constructions:

	<i>He grows flowers</i>
	<i>The flowers grow in the garden</i>
grow Er züchtet Blumen Die Blumen wachsen im Garten	<i>She left the house</i>
leave Sie verließ das Haus Ich ließ den Brief im Fach (liegen)	<i>I left the letter in the pigeonhole</i>
Der Zug fährt schon ab Er ging früher als ich (weg)	<i>The train is already leaving</i>
open (see also (iii) below) Ich machte die Tür auf Die Tür ging auf	<i>He left before me</i>
	<i>I opened the door</i>

(ii) **Related verbs are used in German**, especially with a prefixed verb used in the transitive construction. In particular, the prefix **be** - (see 20.5.1) is often used to make transitive verbs from intransitive verbs, but other prefixes (e.g. *er* - and *ver* -) can sometimes have this function, and there are some pairs of verbs with vowel changes:

	<i>She answered the question</i> <i>She answered</i>
answer Sie beantwortete die Frage Sie antwortete	<i>I climbed the mountain</i>
climb Ich bestieg den Berg Ich erstieg den Berg Die	<i>I climbed the mountain (to</i>
Maschine stieg	<i>the top)</i>
drown Man ertränkte die Hexe Die Matrosen	<i>The plane climbed</i>
ertranken	<i>The witch was drowned</i>
sink Wir versenkten das Schiff Das Schiff sank	<i>The sailors drowned</i>
sit Sie setzt sich auf den Stuhl Sie sitzt auf dem	<i>We sank the ship</i>
Stuhl	<i>The ship sank</i>
	<i>She sits down on the chair</i>
	<i>She is sitting on the chair</i>

(iii) **Some transitive German verbs can be used reflexively** as the equivalent of the English verb used intransitively:

change Das hat nichts geändert Das hat sich	<i>That has changed nothing</i>
geändert	<i>That has changed</i>
feel Sie fühlte etwas unter ihren Füßen Sie fühlte	<i>She felt something under</i>
sich unwohl	<i>her feet</i>
open (see also (i) above) Ich öffnete die Tür Die Tür	<i>She felt unwell</i>
öffnete sich	<i>I opened the door</i>
turn Ich drehte das Rad Das Rad drehte sich	<i>The door opened</i>
	<i>I turned the wheel</i>
	<i>The wheel turned</i>

(iv) A construction with **lassen** and an intransitive verb can correspond to the

English transitive verb. For this ‘causative’ use of *lassen*, see 11.3.1c:

drop Ich ließ den Stein fallen Der Stein fiel	<i>I dropped the stone</i>
fail Sie haben den Kandidaten durchfallen lassen Der Kandidat ist durchgefallen	<i>The stone dropped</i>
run Ich habe das Wasser in die Badewanne laufen lassen Der Wasserhahn läuft	<i>They failed the candidate</i>
	<i>The candidate failed</i>
	<i>I’ve run the bathwater</i>
	<i>The tap’s running</i>

(v) A construction with *sich lassen* and a German transitive verb sometimes corresponds to the intransitive use of the verb in English. For this construction with *sich lassen*, see 13.4.6:

cut Sie hat das Papier geschnitten Das Papier lässt sich leicht schneiden	<i>She cut the paper</i>
	<i>The paper cuts easily</i>

(b) Some German transitive verbs have English equivalents with different constructions

i.e. the closest English equivalents are not transitive verbs but have other constructions, e.g.:

etwas beantragen	<i>to apply for sth.</i>
jdn. beerben	to inherit from sb.
etwas bezahlen	to pay for sth.
etwas dauert mich	I regret sth.
etwas ekelt mich (see also 16.2.2)	I am disgusted at sth.
etwas freut mich	I am pleased/glad about sth.
jdn./etwas fürchten	<i>to be afraid of sb./sth.</i>

16.3.5 Reflexive verbs

Many German verbs are always used with a reflexive pronoun in the accusative case (see 3.2), e.g. *sich beeilen* ‘hurry’, *sich erkälten* ‘catch a cold’. These REFLEXIVE VERBS have no direct equivalent in English – reflexive pronouns like ‘myself’ in English are used in a quite different way – and they can correspond to a variety of English verb constructions and verb types.

Some German reflexive verbs have English equivalents quite different from the simple verb (and the English equivalent is often an intransitive verb), e.g. *sich setzen* ‘sit down’ (cf. *setzen* ‘put’), etc., see 16.3.4a. In some instances the nearest English equivalent is a passive (or passive-like) construction (see 13.4.3).

Many verbs used with a reflexive accusative also have other complements, e.g. a dative, genitive or prepositional object. They are treated in the sections dealing with these other complements. Some verbs have a reflexive object in the dative case rather than the accusative and these are explained in section 16.4.3.

It is helpful to distinguish two types of reflexive verb in German:

(c) ‘True’ reflexive verbs, which are only used with a reflexive pronoun

With these, the reflexive pronoun is an integral part of the verb:

<i>sich bedanken</i>	<i>say ‘thank you’</i>	<i>sich erholen</i>	<i>recover</i>
<i>sich beeilen</i>	<i>hurry</i>	<i>sich erkälten</i>	<i>catch a cold</i>
<i>sich befinden</i>	<i>be (situated)</i>	<i>sich irren</i>	<i>be mistaken</i>
<i>sich benehmen</i>	<i>behave</i>	<i>sich verabschieden</i>	<i>say ‘goodbye’</i>
<i>sich eignen</i>	<i>be suited</i>	<i>sich verneigen</i>	<i>bow</i>
<i>sich entschließen</i>	<i>decide</i>	<i>sich weigern</i>	<i>refuse</i>

(d) Other transitive verbs used reflexively

With these the usual direct object appears as a reflexive pronoun.

(i) Many transitive verbs can be used with a reflexive pronoun. The agent is then performing the action on him-/herself. Compare:

non-reflexive	reflexive
Das habe ich meinen Bruder gefragt	Das habe ich mich gefragt
Ich setzte den Koffer auf den Stuhl	Ich setzte mich auf den Stuhl
Ich habe den Hund gewaschen	Ich habe mich gewaschen
Ich habe ihn nicht überzeugen können	Ich habe mich nicht überzeugen können

(ii) Many transitive verbs denoting activities and accomplishments can be used reflexively with a subject which is not the person carrying out the action. These typically correspond to English passive constructions:

Das **erklärt sich** leicht *That is easily explained*

Mein Verdacht **hat sich bestätigt** *My suspicions were confirmed*

Intransitive verbs denoting activities and accomplishments can also be used in a similar way with a reflexive pronoun. These constructions are always impersonal and have a sense similar to a construction with *man* (see also 13.4.3).

Dort **wohnt es sich** gut *One can live well there*

Hier **arbeitet es sich** bequem *One can work comfortably here*

(iii) A few verbs have reflexive and non-reflexive forms where the reflexive variant is a 'true' reflexive, with a slightly different meaning, see also 16.3.4a:

Das erinnert mich an etwas *That reminds me of something*

Ich erinnere mich an etwas *I remember something*

Das habe ich ihr versprochen *I promised her that*

Ich habe mich versprochen *I made a slip of the tongue*

16.4 The dative object

A DATIVE OBJECT occurs in three main sentence patterns:

together with an accusative object :	Maria hat ihrem Freund den Reiseführer geliehen
as the sole object of a verb:	Maria hat ihrer Schwester geholfen
together with a prepositional object :	Maria hat Ihrer Mutter für das Geschenk gedankt

The **prepositional objects** used with a dative object are treated in 16.5. There are also verbs with a **reflexive object** in the dative case, and these are explained in 16.4.3. As explained in 13.1.3, a dative object can never be converted into the subject of a corresponding passive sentence.

Besides dative objects, there are also ‘free’ datives and possessive datives, which are not grammatical requirements of particular verbs in the way that dative objects are. These are explained in section 2.5.2.

16.4.1 Verbs governing a dative and an accusative object

These are transitive verbs with two complements, i.e. a **direct object** in the accusative case, which is usually a thing, and a dative object, called the **indirect object**, which is usually a person. It is helpful to remember them as *einem etwas* verbs.

The German dative commonly corresponds to an English indirect object, e.g. *He gave his uncle the money*, or an English prepositional phrase with ‘to’, e.g. *He gave the money to his uncle*.

In German, the indirect object is **always indicated by the dative case, never by a preposition**: *Er gab seinem Onkel das Geld*.

With many verbs (e.g. *geben*) the dative object is necessary for a grammatical sentence, with others (e.g. *beweisen*) it can be dropped in appropriate contexts.

(a) Verbs of giving and taking (in the widest sense) govern a dative and an accusative object

There are a large number of such verbs:

Sie haben mir eine Stelle angeboten	
Das wollte er (mir) beweisen	
Er brachte (ihr) einen Blumenstrauß	<i>They offered me a job</i>
Ich kann (dir) diesen Roman empfehlen	He wanted to prove that (to me)
Er hat dem Lehrer einen Bleistift gegeben	He brought (her) a bunch of flowers
Sie will mir jetzt etwas Ruhe gönnen	I can recommend this novel (to you)
Kannst du mir hundert Franken leihen?	He gave the teacher a pencil
Wir haben (ihr) die Tasche genommen	She is now willing to let me have some peace and quiet
Ich habe (ihr) das Paket geschickt	Can you lend me a hundred francs?
Du schuldest mir noch hundert Euro	We took the bag (from her)
Er verkaufte (mir) seinen alten Golf	I've sent (her) the parcel
Er zeigte ihr seine Kupferstiche	You still owe me a hundred euros
	He sold (me) his old Golf
	<i>He showed her his etchings</i>

(b) Most verbs involving an act of speaking are used with a dative and an accusative object

(i) With most of these verbs the accusative object can only be either a neuter or indefinite pronoun (e.g. *es*, *das*, *etwas*, *nichts*) or a clause (a subordinate clause introduced by *dass*, *ob* etc., or an infinitive clause). The equivalent English verbs often have quite different constructions:

Sie hat (**mir**) geantwortet, dass sie

She answered me, and said she was

morgen kommen wollte	<i>going to come tomorrow</i>
Wer hat (dir) befohlen, die Geiseln zu erschießen?	Who gave (you) the order to shoot the hostages?
Das habe ich ihm schon gestern erzählt	I already told him that yesterday
Er hat mir geraten, mein Haus zu verkaufen	He advised me to sell my house
Er versicherte mir , dass er alles erledigt hätte	He assured me he had taken care of everything
Das wird er (dir) nie verzeihen können	<i>He'll never be able to forgive you that</i>

With **antworten**, the dative is only used for persons, cf. *Er hat auf meinen Brief, auf meine Frage geantwortet.*

sagen is normally used in this way, with a dative of the person if required:

Was wollen Sie (ihm) sagen?	<i>What do you want to say (to him)?</i>
Sie sagte mir, dass sie es auf keinen Fall machen würde	<i>She told me that on no account would she do that</i>

However, it is used with *zu* when introducing direct speech, or for persons addressing themselves:

„Nun komm doch!“ sagte sie zu Christian	<i>‘Come along now’, she said to Christian</i>
„Wie kannst du das nur machen?“, sagte er zu sich selbst	<i>‘How on earth can you do that?’, he said to himself</i>

(ii) With a few verbs the accusative object or the dative object can be omitted, as the context requires. This is not possible with all the nearest equivalent verbs in English:

Die iranische Regierung erlaubte (der Delegation) die Einreise	<i>The Iranian government allowed the delegation into the country</i>
Sie hat mir (einen langen Brief) geschrieben	<i>She wrote me (a long letter)</i>
Hat sie dir gestern gemailt?	<i>Did she e-mail you yesterday?</i>
Das hat sie mir vorhin gesimst	<i>She texted me that just now</i>

(iii) ***glauben*** has a dative of the person and/or an accusative of the thing:

Er glaubt **dem** Lehrer

Er glaubt **jedes** Wort

Er glaubt **dem** Lehrer **jedes** Wort

glauben an (acc.) (see 16.6.2b), is used for ‘believe in’: *Ich glaube an seinen Erfolg.*

(c) Differences between German *einem etwas* constructions and English

Some German verbs have indirect and direct objects and this differs from the construction used with the nearest equivalent English verb:

Man merkt ihm die Anstrengung an
Sie fügte es dem Brief bei
Das hat ihm das Studium ermöglicht/
erschwert
Das hat sie mir gestern mitgeteilt
Die Polizei konnte ihm nichts
nachweisen
Das hat sie mir aber verschwiegen
Das hätte ich ihr nicht zugetraut

One notices the effort he's making
She enclosed it with the letter
That made it possible/difficult for him
to study
She informed me of that yesterday
The police couldn't prove anything
against him
She didn't tell me about that, though
I wouldn't have believed her capable of
that

(d) Verbs of sending or transferring

With verbs of sending or transferring, a phrase with *an* is often used instead of a noun phrase in the dative. The effect is to emphasize the recipient more strongly:

Ich habe ein Paket **an meinen Vater** geschickt

Ich habe einen Brief **an deinen Vater** geschrieben

Sie hat den alten Audi **an ihren Vater** verkauft

(e) A few reflexive verbs have a dative object

With these the reflexive pronoun is the accusative object:

Sie mussten sich **dem Feind** ergeben *They had to surrender to the enemy*

Sie näherten sich **der Stadt** *They approached the city*

16.4.2 Verbs governing the dative

A fair number of German verbs have a dative object, but no accusative object.

These have no direct equivalent in English. No general rules can be given as to which verbs govern a dative object, but it is helpful to be aware that these dative objects often relate to persons who are advantaged or disadvantaged in some way through the action expressed by the verb.

(a) Common verbs which govern a dative object

abraten *advise against* Sie hat **ihm** davon abgeraten
ähneln *resemble, look like* Er ähnelt **seinem Bruder**
applaudieren *applaud* Sie applaudierten **dem Solisten**
ausweichen *get out of the way of, evade, avoid* Er ist **der Gefahr** ausgewichen
begegnen *meet (by chance)* Ich bin **ihr** in der Stadt begegnet
***bekommen** *agree with one (of food)* Fleisch bekommt **mir** nicht
danken *thank* Ich dankte **ihnen** sehr dafür
dienen *serve* Er diente **dem König von Italien**

*She advised him
against it
He looks like his
brother
They applauded
the soloist
He avoided the
danger
I met her in town
Meat doesn't agree
with me
I thanked them
very much for it*

*He served the king
of Italy*

drohen *threaten* Sie drohte **ihm** mit einem Stock
einfallen *occur* Das ist **mir** nicht eingefallen
erliegen *succumb to* Er **erlag** seinen Wunden
folgen *follow* Er ist **ihr** ins Exil gefolgt
gehören *obey* Sie gehorcht **ihrem Vater**
* **gehören** *belong* Der Mercedes gehört **mir** nicht
gelten *be meant for, be aimed at, be for* Gilt diese
Bemerkung **mir** ? Der Beifall galt **den Schauspielern**
gleichen *be equal to, resemble* Jeder Tag glich **dem anderen**
gratulieren *congratulate* Sie haben **ihr** zum Geburtstag
gratuliert
helfen *help* Er half **seinem Vater** in der Küche
imponieren *impress* Sie hat **ihm** sehr imponiert
* **kündigen** *fire, give notice* Der Chef hat **ihm** gestern
gekündigt
misstrauen *distrust, not trust* Sie misstraut **den Politikern**
nutzen/nützen *be of use* Das nutzt **mir** doch gar nichts
* **passen** *suit* Das neue Kleid passt **dir** gut
schaden *harm* Rauchen schadet **der Gesundheit**
schmeicheln *flatter* Der Student wollte **dem Professor**
schmeicheln
trauen *trust* Ich traute **meinen Augen** nicht
trotzen *defy* Er trotzte **der Gefahr**
unterliegen *be defeated by, be subject to* Er unterlag **seinem**
Gegner
vertrauen *have trust in* **jdm.** blind vertrauen
wehtun *hurt* Der Wespenstich hat **ihm** wehgetan
She threatened him with a stick
That didn't occur to me
He succumbed to his injuries
He followed her into exile
She obeys her father
The Mercedes doesn't belong to me

Is that comment meant for me?
The applause was for the actors
One day was like the next
They congratulated her on her birthday
He helped his father in the kitchen
She impressed him a lot
The boss gave him notice yesterday
She doesn't trust politicians
But that's no use to me
The new dress suits you
Smoking is harmful to your health
The student wanted to flatter the professor
I couldn't believe my eyes
He defied/braved the danger
He lost to his opponent
have a blind trust in somebody
The wasp sting hurt him

The asterisked verbs are also used in other constructions, often with a different meaning. For example, *bekommen* with an accusative object means 'receive': *Er bekam einen langen Brief von seinem Vater.*

(b) Most verbs with the meaning 'happen', 'occur' govern a dative

Es wird **dir** doch nichts geschehen *But nothing will happen to you*

Was ist **ihm** gestern passiert? *What happened to him yesterday?*

So etwas ist **mir** noch nie vorgekommen *Nothing like that has ever happened to me*

Similarly: *bevorstehen*, *widerfahren*, *zustoßen*, etc.

(c) Verbs with certain prefixes usually take a dative

in particular those with *bei* -, *ent*, *entgegen* -, *nach* -, *wider* -, *zu* -:

Er ist **der** SPD beigetreten *He joined the SPD*

Das entsprach **meinen** Erwartungen *That came up to my expectations*

Sie kam **mir** entgegen *She came towards me*

Er eilte **ihr** nach *He hurried after her*

Das Kind widersprach **seiner** Mutter *The child contradicted its mother*

Er hat **dem** Gespräch zugehört *He listened to the conversation*

Similarly (among many others):

beistehen	<i>give support to</i>	nachlaufen	<i>run after</i>
beiwohnen	be present at	nachstellen	follow, pester
entgegengehen	go to meet	nachstreben	emulate
entgegenwirken	counteract	sich widersetzen	oppose
entsagen	renounce	widerstehen	resist
entstammen	originate from	zulaufen	run up to
nachgeben	give way to	zustimmen	agree with
nachkommen	<i>follow</i>	zuvorkommen	<i>anticipate</i>

All the verbs prefixed with *ent* - meaning 'escape' (*entgehen*, *entkommen*, *entrinnen*, *entwischen*, etc.) also all govern a dative.

A few verbs with these prefixes have a dative and an accusative object, e.g. *jdm. etwas beibringen* 'teach somebody something', *jdm. etwas zutrauen* 'credit somebody with something'.

(d) The dative object of some verbs corresponds to the subject of the usual English equivalent

Etwas fällt mir auf	<i>I notice something</i>
Etwas entfällt mir	I forget something
Es fällt mir leicht/schwer	<i>I find something easy/difficult</i>
Es fehlt, mangelt mir an etwas	<i>I lack something</i>
Etwas fehlt, mangelt mir	
Etwas gefällt mir	<i>I like something</i>

Etwas geht mir auf	I realize something
Etwas gelingt mir	I succeed in something
Etwas tut mir Leid	I am sorry about something
Das leuchtet mir nicht ein	I don't understand that
Es liegt mir viel an etwas (<i>dat.</i>)	I am keen on something
Etwas liegt mir	I fancy something
Das genügt, reicht mir	I have had enough of that
Etwas schmeckt mir	<i>I like something (i.e. food)</i>

With these verbs, the dative object tends to come first in main clauses, e.g. **Mir** hat das nicht gefallen.

16.4.3 Verbs with a dative reflexive pronoun

(a) Many verbs governing a dative can be used with a dative reflexive pronoun

The action then refers back to the subject. Both types of verbs governing the dative can be used in this way, i.e.:

(i) **einem etwas** verbs (see 16.4.1):

Ich erlaubte **mir**, ihm zu widersprechen *I allowed myself to contradict him*

Ich muss **mir** Arbeit verschaffen *I must find work*

Ich habe **mir** zu viel zugemutet *I've taken on too much*

(ii) Verbs with **only a dative object** (see 16.4.2):

Ich habe **mir** mehrmals widersprochen *I contradicted myself several times*

Du schadest **dir** mit dem Rauchen *You're harming yourself by smoking*

(b) A few other verbs are used with a dative reflexive pronoun

These are ‘true’ reflexive verbs (see 16.3.5a), where the reflexive pronoun is an integral part of the verb. All also have an accusative object:

Das habe ich **mir** angeeignet *I acquired that*

Das habe ich **mir** eingebildet *I imagined that*

Das verbitte ich **mir** *I refuse to tolerate that*

Ich habe **mir** vorgenommen, das zu tun *I have resolved to do that*

Das kann ich **mir** gut vorstellen *I can imagine that well*

Ich habe **mir** eine Grippe zugezogen *I contracted flu*

16.5 Prepositional objects

16.5.1 Many verbs have a prepositional object as complement

The PREPOSITION used in PREPOSITIONAL OBJECTS is wholly **idiomatic** and determined by the individual verb. The fact that German has *Ich warte **auf** Sie* for English ‘I am waiting **for** you’, for example, is not related in any way to the usual meaning of the German preposition *auf* or the English preposition ‘for’. For this reason, each combination of verb and preposition has to be learned separately and remembered as a whole.

Prepositional objects occur in three main sentence patterns:

- as the **only complement** of a verb: Maria wartet draußen **auf ihre Freundinnen**
- together with a **direct object**: Maria erinnerte **ihren Bruder an sein Versprechen**
- together with a **dative object**: Maria hat **Ihrer Mutter für das Geschenk gedankt**

In addition, there are a few verbs which govern two prepositional objects.

All prepositional objects are treated in this section under the individual prepositions, with other complements governed by the verb indicated as appropriate.

16.5.2 *an*

an is most often followed by the **dative case** in prepositional objects, but a few verbs govern *an* with the accusative.

(a) *an* with the dative case

Prepositional objects with *an* followed by a dative often convey the idea of ‘in respect of, in connection with’:

Ich erkannte sie an ihrem knallroten Haar	<i>I recognized her by her bright red</i>
Er ist an einer Lungenentzündung	<i>hair</i>
gestorben	He died of pneumonia
Ich zweifle an seiner Ehrlichkeit	<i>I doubt his honesty</i>

A selection of other verbs:

arbeiten an *work at*

erkranken an *fall ill with*

Es fehlt mir an etwas *I lack sth. (see 16.4.2d)*

sich an jdm./etwas freuen *take pleasure in sb./sth.*

gewinnen an (e.g. an Bedeutung gewinnen) *gain (in)*

jdn. an etwas hindern *prevent sb. from (doing) sth.*

leiden an *suffer from*

Es liegt mir viel an etwas *I am very keen on sth. (see 16.4.2d)*

mitwirken an *play a part in*

sich an etwas orientieren *orientate oneself by sth.*

etwas an jdm. rachen *avenge sth. on sb.*

sich an jdm. für etwas rachen *take revenge on sb. for sth.*

teilnehmen an *take part in*

verlieren an (e.g. an Boden verlieren) *lose (some)*

sich freuen is used with other prepositions with different meanings, i.e. *auf* (acc.), 'look forward to', see 16.5.3a and *über*, see 16.5.9.

(b) *an* with the accusative case

Most of the few verbs which govern a prepositional object with *an* and a following accusative case denote mental processes:

Maria denkt immer **an ihren kleinen Bruder** *Maria is always thinking of her little brother*

Du erinnerst mich **an ihn** *You remind me of him*

Ich erinnere mich **an ihn** *I remember him* (see 16.7.2)

Ich glaube **an den Fortschritt** *I believe in progress* (see 16.4.1b)

The other verbs with *an* and an accusative:

sich an etwas halten *stick to sth.* sich an etwas gewöhnen *get used to sth.*

16.5.3 *auf*

auf most often occurs with the **accusative case** in prepositional objects. Very few verbs govern *auf* with the dative.

(a) *auf* with the accusative case is the commonest preposition in prepositional objects

Ich werde **auf deine Kinder** aufpassen *I'll mind your children*

Seine Bemerkung bezog sich **auf dich** *His comment related to you*

Das läuft **auf das Gleiche** hinaus *It amounts to the same thing*

Er wies (mich) **auf die Schwierigkeiten** hin *He pointed the difficulties out (to me)*

A selection of other verbs:

achten auf	} <i>pay attention to</i>	rechnen auf	<i>count on</i>
Acht geben auf		schwören auf	<i>swear on/by</i>
sich berufen auf	<i>refer to</i>	sich spezialisieren	<i>specialize in</i>
drängen auf	<i>press for</i>	auf	
sich erstrecken auf	<i>extend to</i>	sich stützen auf	<i>lean, count on</i>
folgen auf	<i>follow (see 16.4.2a)</i>	sich verlassen auf	<i>rely on</i>
sich freuen auf	<i>look forward to</i>	sich verstehen auf	<i>be expert in</i>
hoffen auf	<i>hope for</i>	(jdn.) verweisen auf	<i>refer (sb.) to</i>
sich konzentrieren	<i>concentrate on</i>	verzichten auf	<i>do without</i>
auf		warten auf	<i>wait for</i>
pfeifen auf (coll.)	<i>not care less about</i>	zählen auf	<i>count on</i>
pochen auf	<i>insist on</i>	zurückkommen auf	<i>come back to, refer to</i>
reagieren auf	<i>react to</i>		

Es kommt (mir) auf etwas an *sth. matters (to me)*

etwas auf etwas beschränken *limit/restrict/confine sth. to sth.*

sich auf etwas beschränken *limit oneself/be limited to sth.*

etwas auf etwas zurückführen *put sth. down to sth.*

(b) *auf* with the dative case

A few verbs which convey the idea of not moving govern *auf* with the **dative** case:

Er beharrte **auf seiner Meinung** *He didn't shift from his opinion*

Ich bestehe **auf meinem Recht** *I insist on my right*

Similarly: *beruhen auf* (dat.), *fußen auf* (dat.), which both mean 'be based on', 'rest on', but *sich gründen auf* 'be based on', is followed by the accusative, e.g. *Der Vorschlag gründet sich auf diese Annahme.*

basieren auf, when used intransitively, in the meaning ‘be based on’ is followed by the dative, e.g. *Das basiert auf genauer Kenntnis dieser Methode*. When used transitively, in the meaning ‘base (sth.) on’ it can be followed by the dative or the accusative, although the accusative is more frequent, e.g. *Sie basierte ihre Aussage auf zahlreiche Beispiele* (less common: *zahlreichen Beispielen*).

Note *bestehen aus* ‘consist of’ (16.5.4) and *bestehen in* ‘consist in’ (16.5.6b).

16.5.4 *aus*

aus usually has the meaning ‘of’, ‘from’ in prepositional objects.

Ihr Essen bestand **aus trockenem Brot** *Their food consisted of dry bread*

Other verbs:

etwas aus etwas entnehmen, ersen *infer, gather sth. from sth.*

sich aus etwas ergeben *result from sth.*

etwas aus etwas folgern, schließen *conclude sth. from sth.*

Some of these verbs are used with other prepositions or constructions, often with different meanings:

(i) *bestehen auf* ‘insist on’ (see 16.5.3b), *bestehen in* ‘consist in’ (16.5.6b).

(ii) *entnehmen* can alternatively be constructed with a dative, e.g. *Ich entnehme (aus) Ihrem Brief, dass Sie das Geschäft aufgeben wollen*.

(iii) *sich in etwas ergeben* ‘submit to sth.’ (see 16.5.6a), *sich jdm./etwas ergeben* ‘surrender to sb./sth.’ (see 16.4.1e).

16.5.5 *für*

für usually has the meaning ‘for’ in prepositional objects.

Ich habe ihm **für seine Mühe** gedankt *I thanked him for his trouble*

Ich habe mich **für den Audi** entschieden *I decided on the Audi*

Ich halte deine Freundin **für hochbegabt** *I consider your friend to be very gifted*

A selection of other verbs:

sich (bei jdm.) für etwas bedanken *give thanks for sth. (to sb.)*

sich für etwas begeistern *be enthusiastic about sth.*

sich für jdn./etwas eignen *be suitable for sb./sth.*

sich für jdn./etwas interessieren *be interested in sb./sth.*

sich für jdn./etwas schämen *be ashamed of sth./for sb.*

für jdn./etwas sorgen *take care of/look after sb./sth.*

Notes on some of these verbs:

(i) Non-reflexive *interessieren* is used with *für* or *an* (dat.), e.g. *Er interessierte sie für das/an dem Unternehmen.*

(ii) *sich eignen zu/als* means 'be suitable as' (see 16.5.13).

(iii) *sich (wegen) jds./etwas schämen* (see 16.7.2) 'be ashamed of sb./sth.', *sich vor jdm. schämen* 'feel ashamed in front of sb.' (see 16.5.12a).

(iv) *sich um jdn./etwas sorgen* 'be worried about sb./sth.'

16.5.6 *in*

(a) *in* is most often used with the accusative case in prepositional objects

Sie willigte **in die Scheidung** ein *She agreed to the divorce*

Er verliebte sich **in sie** *He fell in love with her*

A selection of other verbs:

jdn. in etwas einführen *introduce sb. to sth.*

sich ergeben in *submit to* (see 16.5.4)

sich mischen in *meddle in*

sich vertiefen in *become engrossed in*

(b) Very few verbs govern *in* with the dative case

Meine Aufgabe besteht in der Erledigung der Korrespondenz	<i>My duties consist in dealing with the correspondence</i>
Ich habe mich nicht in ihr getäuscht	<i>I was not mistaken in (my judgement of) her</i>

Both these verbs are used with other prepositions with different meanings, i.e. *bestehen auf* ‘insist on’ (16.5.3b), *bestehen aus* ‘consist of’ (16.5.4), *sich täuschen über* ‘to be mistaken about’ (16.5.9a).

16.5.7 *mit*

mit usually has the sense of ‘with’ in prepositional objects.

Sie hat **mit ihrer Arbeit** angefangen *She made a start on her work*

Willst du bitte **damit** aufhören? *Please stop doing that*

Sie hat ihm **mit der Faust** gedroht *She threatened him with her fist*

Mein Freund simst **mit anderen Frauen** *My boyfriend texts other women*

Ich habe gestern **mit ihm** telefoniert *I spoke to him on the telephone yesterday*

A selection of other verbs:

sich abfinden mit *be satisfied with*

sich befassen mit *deal with*

zusammenstoßen mit *collide with*

Two verbs are used with other prepositions with slightly different meanings, i.e.

sich erkundigen über ‘enquire about’ and *fragen über* ‘ask about’ (see 16.5.9).

(b) *nach* has the sense of English ‘of’ with verbs of smelling, etc.

Es riecht nach Teer *It smells of tar*

Es schmeckte nach Fisch *It tasted of fish*

Similarly: *duften nach*, *stinken nach*, etc., and *Es sieht nach Regen aus* ‘It looks like rain’.

16.5.9 über

über always governs the **accusative** case in prepositional objects.

(a) *über* corresponds to English ‘about’ with verbs of saying, etc.

Ich habe mich sehr über sein Benehmen geärgert	<i>I was very annoyed at his behaviour</i>
Sie musste lange darüber nachdenken	She had to think it over for a long time
Ich habe gestern mit dem Chef über diese Bewerbung gesprochen	<i>I talked to the boss about this application yesterday</i>

Many verbs can be used with *über* in this sense, e.g.:

sich bei jdm. über etwas beklagen/beschweren	<i>complain to sb. about sth.</i>
sich über jdn./etwas freuen	<i>be pleased about sth.</i> (see 16.5.2a, 16.5.3a)
jdn. über etwas informieren	inform sb. about sth.
über jdn./etwas spotten	mock sb./sth.
sich täuschen über etwas	<i>be mistaken about sth.</i> (see 16.5.6b)
über etwas urteilen	judge sth.
sich über jdn./etwas wundern	<i>be surprised at sb./sth.</i>

Some verbs, i.e. *denken*, *erzählen*, *hören*, *lesen*, *sagen*, *schreiben*, *sprechen* and *wissen* can be used with *über* or *von* in the sense of ‘about’. *über* tends to refer to something more extensive than *von*. Compare:

Was denken Sie **darüber** ? *What is your view of that?*

Was denken Sie **von ihm** ? *What do you think of him?*

Er wusste viel über Flugzeuge *He knew a lot about aeroplanes*

Er wusste nichts von ihrem Tod *He knew nothing of her death*

(b) Other verbs governing a prepositional object with *über*

es nicht über sich bringen, etwas zu tun *not bring oneself to do sth.*

sich über etwas hinwegsetzen *disregard sth.*

über etwas verfügen *have sth. at one's disposal*

16.5.10 μm

um usually has the meaning ‘concerning’, ‘in respect of’ in prepositional objects.

Sie hat sich um ihre Schwester in Dresden	<i>She was worried about her sister in</i>
geängstigt	<i>Dresden</i>
Es handelte sich um eine Wette	It was a question of a bet
Ich kümmerte mich um meine Enkelkinder	<i>I took care of my grandchildren</i>

A selection of other verbs:

sich um etwas bemühen *take trouble over sth.*

jd{n}. um etwas beneiden *envy sb. sth.*

jdn. um etwas betrügen *cheat sb. out of sth.*

jd. um etwas bitten, ersuchen (*elev.*) *ask sb. for sth., request sth. from sb.*

jd{n}. um etwas bringen *make sb. lose sth.*

Es geht um etwas (see 16.2.4g) *Something is at stake*

um etwas kommen *lose sth., be deprived of sth.*

sich um jdn./etwas sorgen *be worried about sth.*

sich um/über etwas streiten *argue about/over sth.*

Note, with a different preposition and a different meaning *sich ängstigen vor* ‘be afraid of’ (16.5.12).

16.5.11 von

von usually has the sense of English ‘of’ or ‘from’ in prepositional objects.

Ich will dich nicht von der Arbeit abhalten	<i>I don't want to keep you from your work</i>
Wir müssen davon ausgehen, dass ...	We must start by assuming that ...
Ich muss mich von meinem Kollegen distanzieren	I have to dissociate myself from my colleague
Das Kind träumte von einer schönen Prinzessin	<i>The child was dreaming of a beautiful princess</i>

A selection of other verbs:

etwas hängt von jdm./etwas ab *sth. depends on sb./sth.*

jdm. von etwas abraten *advise sb. against sth.*

von etwas absehen *refrain from sth., disregard sth.*

jdn. von etwas befreien *liberate sb. from sth.*

sich von etwas erholen *recover from sth.*

von etwas herrühren *stem from sth.*

jdn. von etwas überzeugen *convince sb. of sth.*

jdn. von etwas verständigen *inform sb. of sth.*

von etwas zeugen *show, demonstrate sth.*

16.5.12 *vor*

vor is always used with the **dative** case in prepositional objects.

***vor* often corresponds to English ‘of’ with verbs of fearing, etc.**

Ich ekele mich vor diesen großen Spinnen	<i>I have a horror of these big spiders</i> (see 16.2.2)
Er fürchtete sich vor dem Rottweiler	He was afraid of the Rottweiler
Er warnte mich vor dem Treibsand	<i>He warned me about the quicksand</i>

A selection of other verbs:

sich vor jdm./etwas ängstigen	<i>be afraid of sb./sth.</i> (see 16.5.10)
Angst vor jdm./etwas haben	be afraid, scared of sb./sth.
sich vor etwas drücken (<i>coll.</i>)	dodge sth.
vor jdm./etwas erschrecken	be scared by sb./sth.
sich vor jdm./etwas hüten	beware of sb./sth., be on one's guard against sb./sth.
sich vor jdm. schämen	<i>feel ashamed in front of sb.</i> (see 16.5.5)
sich vor etwas scheuen	<i>be afraid of, shrink from sth.</i>

***vor* often corresponds to English ‘from’ with verbs of protecting, etc.**

Sie bewahrte ihn **vor der Gefahr** *She protected him from danger*

Sie flohen **vor der Polizei** *They fled from the police*

A selection of other verbs:

jdn. vor jdm./etwas beschützen	<i>protect sb. from sb./sth.</i>
jdn. vor etwas retten	save sb. from sth.
sich vor jdm./etwas verbergen	<i>hide from sb./sth.</i>

16.5.13 *zu*

(a) *zu* often corresponds to English ‘(in)to’

This is especially frequent with verbs of empowering, leading, persuading, etc. All these verbs are transitive, i.e. they have an accusative object besides the prepositional object with *zu*:

Er ermutigte sie **zum Widerstand** *He encouraged them to resist*

Er trieb sie **zur Verzweiflung** *He drove her to despair*

Er überredete mich **zu einem Glas Wein** *He talked me into having a glass of wine*

Er zwang mich **zu einer Entscheidung** *He forced me into a decision*

A selection of other verbs used similarly:

autorisieren	<i>authorize</i>	nötigen	<i>invite</i>
berechtigen	entitle	provozieren	provoke
bewegen	induce	raten	advise
einladen	invite	veranlassen	cause
ermächtigen	empower	verführen	seduce
herausfordern	<i>challenge</i>	verhelfen	<i>help</i>

(b) Some other verbs have a prepositional object with *zu*

Das hat **zu seinem Erfolg** sehr beigetragen *That contributed a lot to his success*

Sie entschloss sich **zur Teilnahme** *She decided to take part*

Ich rechne/zähle ihn **zu meinen Freunden** *I count him among my friends*

A selection of other verbs:

es zu etwas bringen *attain sth.* (see 3.6.2h)

zu etwas dienen *serve as sth.*

sich zu etwas eignen *be suitable as sth.* (see 16.5.5)

zu etwas führen *lead to sth.*
zu etwas gehören *be part of sth., be one of sth. (see 16.4.2a)*
jdm. zu etwas gratulieren *congratulate sb. on sth.*
zu etwas neigen *tend to sth.*
zu jdm./etwas passen *go with sb./sth. (see 16.4.2a)*
sich zu etwas verhalten *stand in a relationship to sth.*

16.5.14 Prepositional objects in the form of a clause

If a prepositional object is in the form of a clause it is frequently anticipated by a prepositional adverb, i.e. the form **da (r) + preposition**, see 3.5. The prepositional object can be a subordinate clause (usually introduced by *dass*), or an infinitive clause with *zu*, for example:

Sie hat ihm **dafür** gedankt, **dass er ihr geholfen hatte**

Ich verlasse mich **darauf**, **dass er alles arrangiert**

Er hinderte mich **daran**, **den Brief zu schreiben**

Ich verlasse mich **darauf**, **ihn zu Hause zu finden**

The prepositional adverb is optional with some verbs, e.g.:

Ich ärgerte mich (**darüber**), dass er so wenig getan hatte

Sie haben (**damit**) angefangen, die Ernte hereinzubringen

There are no precise rules for contexts when the prepositional adverb is used or not, and it is often left out with some common verbs. If it is used, it tends to emphasize the following clause more strongly. In general, it is more commonly included than omitted in written German (and it is never incorrect to include it), whilst omission is more typical of everyday speech.

The following list gives some common verbs with which the prepositional adverb is often left out:

abhalten von	sich ekeln vor	raten zu
abraten von	sich entscheiden für	sich scheuen vor
Acht geben auf	sich entschließen zu	sich schämen über
anfangen mit	sich erinnern an	sich sehnen nach
(sich) ärgern über	fragen nach	sorgen für
aufhören mit	sich freuen auf/über	sich sorgen um
aufpassen auf	sich fürchten vor	sich streiten über
beginnen mit	glauben an	träumen von
sich beklagen über	hindern an	überzeugen von
sich bemühen um	hoffen auf	urteilen über
sich beschweren über	sich hüten vor	sich wundern über
bitten um	klagen über	zweifeln an

In addition, the prepositional adverb can be omitted with all the transitive verbs used with *zu* (see 16.5.13a).

16.6 Predicate complements

16.6.1 Predicate complements with copular verbs

PREDICATE COMPLEMENTS are used with very few verbs, but these are common and important, like *sein* and *werden*. These verbs typically have a **noun phrase** or an **adjective** with them which describes the subject in some way:

Er ist **mein Freund** Das scheint mir **ratsam**

Das Buch ist **langweilig** Er wurde **Katholik**

Sie ist **blass** geworden Du bist ganz **der Alte** geblieben

These verbs are known as COPULAR (i.e. ‘linking’) verbs, because the verb simply links the subject with the noun phrase or adjective which makes up the predicate complement. We can see this by comparing the following sentences:

Holger fährt einen Bus *Holger drives a bus*

Holger ist Busfahrer *Holger is a bus driver*

In the first sentence, *Holger* and *Bus* refer to clearly different things, but in the second *Holger* and *Busfahrer* refer to one and the same person. Because the complement simply describes the subject, it is **in the nominative case** if it is a noun.

The following verbs are used with a predicate complement:

bleiben	<i>remain</i>	sein	<i>be</i>	scheinen	<i>seem</i>
heißen	<i>be called</i>	werden	<i>become</i>		

werden is used in two sentence patterns. When used with a predicate complement, it has the meaning ‘become’ and is typically used with nouns denoting professions and beliefs, etc. (e.g. *Er wurde Katholik, Kommunist; Sie werden Soldaten*). When used with a prepositional object introduced by *zu*, it means ‘change, develop, turn into’:

Die Felder waren **zu Seen** geworden *The fields had turned into lakes*

Das ist mir **zur Gewohnheit** geworden *That has become a habit of mine*

Es wurde **zur Mode** *It became a fashion*

Er wurde **zum Verbrecher** *He became a criminal*

The verbs *bleiben* and *sein* can also be used with place complements (see 16.8), e.g. *Wir bleiben/sind heute in der Schule*.

16.6.2 Predicate complements in the accusative case

A few **transitive verbs** have a PREDICATE COMPLEMENT in the accusative. This is not a second accusative object, as with the verbs dealt with in 16.3.3, but an additional element which relates back to the accusative object, describing or identifying it:

Er nannte **mich einen Lügner** *He called me a liar*

This construction is only used in German with verbs of calling, i.e. **heißen**, **nennen** and **schimpfen**.

A similar construction is possible with more verbs in English than in German. The German equivalents of these most often have a phrase with *als* in apposition (see 2.6), or a prepositional complement, usually with *zu*, although some verbs select other prepositions:

Ich sehe es als eine Schande an	<i>I consider it a shame</i>
Er erwies sich als Feigling	He proved himself a coward
Er machte sie zu seiner Frau	He made her his wife
Man erklärte ihn zum Verräter	He was declared a traitor
Wir hielten ihn für einen Idioten	<i>We considered/thought him an idiot</i>

16.7 Genitive objects

A small number of verbs have an **object in the genitive case**. With a very few this is the only object, i.e. they are intransitive verbs with no accusative object. Others are transitive verbs with an accusative object and a genitive object. Many of the latter are reflexive verbs.

All these verbs are restricted to formal or specialized registers and most are nowadays uncommon. A few more are used only in set phrases. In the following lists of verbs which are still used with a genitive, the more usual alternatives are given wherever possible.

16.7.1 Verbs with a genitive as the only object

bedürfen *need, require* (more common: *brauchen, benötigen*)

Die Ursache des Unfalls bedarf weiterer Ermittlungen (SZ)	<i>The cause of the accident requires further investigation</i>
--	---

entbehren *lack* (more commonly used with an accusative object)

Der Staat konnte **eines kraftvollen Monarchen** *The state could not do without a*

nicht entbehren (v. *Rimscha*)

powerful monarch

ermangeln *lack* (more usual *fehlen*, see 16.4.2d)

Sein Vortrag ermangelte **jeglicher**
Sachkenntnis

*His lecture was lacking in any kind of
knowledge of the subject*

gedenken *remember* (elev. for *denken an* (acc.), usually with reference to the dead)

Der Bundespräsident gedachte **der**
Opfer des Nationalsozialismus

*The Federal President remembered the
victims of National Socialism*

harren *await* (elev. for *warten auf* (acc.); has a biblical ring)

Wir harren **einer Antwort** (*Zeit*)

We are awaiting an answer

16.7.2 Reflexive verbs with a genitive object

Most of these are ‘true’ reflexive verbs, with an accusative reflexive pronoun (see 16.3.5):

sich annehmen *look after, take care of* (more usual: *sich kümmern um*)

Er hätte sich **dieses Kindes** angenommen
(*Walser*)

*He would have looked after that
child*

sich bedienen *use* (more usual: *benutzen, gebrauchen, verwenden*)

Die Firma bediente sich nur **schmutziger**
Schiffe (*Böll*)

The firm only used dirty ships

sich bemächtigen *seize* (various alternatives, e.g. *ergreifen, nehmen*)

Sie bemächtigten sich **des Bürgermeisters**
von Le Mans (*Zeit*)

They seized the mayor of Le Mans

sich entsinnen *remember* (more usual: *sich erinnern an* (acc.), see 16.5.2b)

Ich entsann mich **des Anblicks** der
langgestreckten Baracken (*Andersch*)

*I remembered the sight of the long
huts*

sich erfreuen *enjoy* (more usual: *genießen, sich freuen über* (acc.))

Sie erfreuten sich **des schönen
Sommerwetters** (OH)

*They were enjoying the fine
summer weather*

sich erinnern *remember* (more usual: *sich erinnern an* (acc.), see 16.5.2b)

Ich erinnere mich **bestimmter Details** noch
(Böll)

I still remember certain details

sich erwehren *refrain from* (more usual: *abwehren*)

Ich konnte mich **eines Lächelns** kaum
erwehren

*I could scarcely refrain from a
smile*

sich rühmen *boast about/of* (more usual: *stolz sein über*)

Die meisten Länder Europas rühmen sich
einer tausendjährigen Geschichte
(Haffner)

*Most European countries can
boast of a thousand years of
history*

sich schämen *be ashamed of* (more usual: *sich schämen für/wegen*, see 16.5.5)

Er schämte sich **seines Betragens**

He was ashamed of his behaviour

sich vergewissern *make sure* (more usual: *nachprüfen, überprüfen*)

Sie vergewisserte sich **der Zuverlässigkeit**
dieses Mannes

*She made sure about this man's
reliability*

16.7.3 Verbs used with a genitive and an accusative object

anklagen *accuse* (outside formal legal parlance: *anklagen wegen*)

Man klagte ihn **der fahrlässigen
Tötung an**

*He was accused of manslaughter through
culpable negligence*

berauben *rob* (more commonly: *einem etwas rauben*)

Er beraubte ihn **der Freiheit** *He robbed him of his freedom*

versichern *assure* (more commonly: *einem etwas zusichern*)

Ich versichere Sie **meines uneingeschränkten**

I assure you of my absolute

The following verbs are used with a genitive in legal language, but with a following clause in non-specialized registers:

jdn. einer Sache beschuldigen/bezichtigen *accuse sb. of sth.*

jdn. einer Sache überführen *convict sb. of sth.*

jdn. einer Sache verdächtigen *suspect sb. of sth.*

16.7.4 Set phrases with a genitive object

Many more verbs were used with a genitive object in older German, and some of these still occur in idiomatic phrases, although they, too, are mainly used in formal writing:

der Gefahr nicht **achten** *pay no heed to danger*

jdn. eines Besseren **belehren** *teach someone better*

sich eines Besseren **besinnen** *think better of something*

jeder Beschreibung **spotten** *beggar description*

jdn. des Landes **verweisen** *expel someone from a country*

seines Amtes **walten** *discharge one's duties*

jdn. keines Blickes **würdigen** *not to deign to look at someone*

16.8 Locative complements

Verbs involving movement typically have a phrase with them indicating the **direction of movement** or the **destination**, and verbs referring to **position** have a phrase to say **where** the relevant person or thing **is located**.

Such phrases are complements of the verb because even if they can often be omitted, they are implicit in the meaning of the verb, as explained in 16.1.4. It is

convenient to take both these **DIRECTION COMPLEMENTS** and **PLACE COMPLEMENTS** together under the general heading of **LOCATIVE COMPLEMENTS**.

It is important to understand that **locative complements differ from adverbials**, which are much more loosely connected with the verb. This difference is particularly important in respect of word order, see 19.7.1.

16.8.1 Direction complements

Most verbs expressing motion can occur with a **direction complement**, typically a phrase which indicates where someone or something is moving. Direction complements usually take the form of a prepositional phrase or an equivalent word. It can be omitted with many verbs.

Some verbs of motion – typically verbs of coming and going – are **intransitive** and only have a direction complement with them:

Gestern ist sie **nach Italien** gefahren

Der Junge fiel **hinein**

Other verbs of motion – typically verbs which express the action of putting something somewhere – are **transitive** and have an accusative object as well as the direction complement:

Ich warf den Ball **dorthin**

Sie legte das Buch **auf den Tisch**

16.8.2 Place complements

Some verbs indicating position require a **place complement**, a word or phrase to denote where someone or something is located, e.g.:

Sie hat lange **in der Pfeilgasse** gewohnt *She lived a long time in the Pfeilgasse*

Der Brief befand sich **dort** *The letter was there*

Nach der Party hat er **bei ihr** übernachtet *He spent the night with her after the party*

Sie hielt sich **in Hamm** auf *She stayed in Hamm*

These phrases are similar to direction complements with verbs of motion because they are closely linked to the meaning of the verb, and in practice the sentences would be ungrammatical if they were omitted. Common verbs with place complements are:

sich aufhalten	<i>stay</i>	liegen	<i>lie, be lying</i>	stehen	<i>stand</i>
bleiben	<i>stay, remain</i>	parken	<i>park</i>	sich verlieren	<i>get lost</i>
hängen	<i>hang</i>	sitzen	<i>sit</i>	wohnen	<i>live, dwell</i>
leben	<i>live</i>	stattfinden	<i>take place</i>	zelten	<i>camp</i>

Conjunctions and subordination

CONJUNCTIONS are words used to **link clauses within a sentence**. There are **two kinds of clause** in English and German:

- MAIN CLAUSES (German *Hauptsätze*) are **independent**, and they are characterized in German by the fact that the **finite verb** in them is in **second position** (see 19.1.1a), e.g.:

Mein Bruder **fährt** morgen mit dem ICE nach Bochum

An dem Abend **fiel** der Meteor auf die Erde

- SUBORDINATE CLAUSES (German *Nebensätze*) are **embedded** within another clause and **dependent** on it. The **finite verb** in them in German is in **final position** (see 19.1.1c), e.g.:

Ich weiß, **dass** mein Bruder morgen nach Bochum **fährt**

Wir sahen im Fernsehen, **wie** der Meteor an dem Abend auf die Erde **fiel**

If a sentence contains **more than one clause**, the clauses can be linked in two ways:

- COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS like **und** or **aber** link **parallel clauses of equal status**. If both are **main clauses**, the verb is in second position in both:

Er ist gestern Abend gekommen, **aber** ich **habe** ihn noch nicht gesehen

Coordinating conjunctions can also join subordinate clauses. The verb is then in final position in both:

Ich weiß, **dass** sie morgen **kommt** **und** dass sie mich sehen **möchte**

- SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS like **dass** or **wenn** introduce **subordinate clauses**:

Ich bringe dir das Buch, **wenn** ich morgen **vorbeikomme**

Subordinate clauses depend on **another clause**, and there are **three main types of subordinate clause**, which differ in their function in the clause they are part of:

- NOUN CLAUSES function like noun phrases, for example as the subject or object of a verb, e.g.:

Ich weiß, **dass** sie morgen **kommt**

As they are typically complements of the verb they are sometimes called **COMPLEMENT CLAUSES**, see 16.3.2.

- ADJECTIVAL CLAUSES have the function of adjectives, e.g.:

die Frau, **die** morgen **kommt**

They are introduced by a relative pronoun, see 5.4, and are often called **RELATIVE CLAUSES**.

- ADVERBIAL CLAUSES have the same function as adverbs, i.e. they indicate time, cause, manner, etc., e.g. (for time):

Die Frau kam, **als** die Sonne **aufging**

They can be classified according to their meaning like adverbs (see [Table 7.1](#)).

This chapter gives details about the conjunctions of German, as follows:

- **Coordinating conjunctions** – *und, aber, oder*, etc. (section 17.1)
- **Noun clauses** – *dass, ob*, etc. (section 17.2)
- **Adverbial clauses**
- Conjunctions of **time** – *als, wenn*, etc. (section 17.3)
- **Causal** conjunctions – *weil, da*, etc. (section 17.4)
- Conjunctions of **purpose** and **result** – *damit, so dass*, etc. (section 17.5)
- **Concessive** conjunctions – *obwohl*, etc. (section 17.6)
- Conjunctions of **manner** and **degree** – *indem, ohne dass*, etc. (section 17.7)

Relative pronouns and relative clauses are dealt with in section 5.4.

Conjunctions used to introduce **conditional clauses** (= ‘if’) are dealt with in section 14.3.

17.1 Coordinating conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions link clauses of the same kind. As shown in the introduction to this chapter they can link main or subordinate clauses, but most of them can also link single words or phrases:

Ich finde dieses Blu-ray Gerät schön, **aber** etwas teuer

Sie hat ein Buch **und** zwei Zeitschriften gekauft

A few, like **sowie**, are only used like this, i.e. they cannot link clauses.

Table 17.1 lists the coordinating conjunctions of German, with the section indicated in which their use is explained.

[Table 17.1](#) Coordinating conjunctions

aber	but	17.1.1	nämlich	as, for	17.1.2
allein	but	17.1.1	oder	or	17.1.3
bald ... bald	now ... now	17.1.5	sondern	but	17.1.1
beziehungsweise	or	17.1.3	sowie	as well as	17.1.4
denn	as, for	17.1.2	sowohl ... als	as well as	17.1.4
doch	but	17.1.1	teils ... teils	partly ... partly	17.1.5
entweder ... oder	either ... or	17.1.3	und	and	17.1.4
jedoch	but	17.1.1	weder ... noch	neither ... nor	17.1.3

17.1.1 *aber, allein, doch, jedoch, sondern*

These conjunctions all indicate restrictions of some kind and can correspond to English *but*.

(a) *aber* is the usual equivalent of English ‘but’

Er runzelte die Stirn, aber sie sagte noch nichts	<i>He frowned, but she still didn't say anything</i>
---	--

For *aber* with *zwar* in the preceding clause, see 17.6.1b.

(b) *allein, doch* and *jedoch*

These are all alternatives to *aber* which are used mainly in formal written, especially literary registers.

(i) *allein* usually introduces a restriction which is unwelcome or unexpected:

Ich hatte gehofft, ihn nach der Sitzung zu sprechen, allein er war nicht zugegen	<i>I had hoped to speak to him after the meeting, but he wasn't present</i>
--	---

(ii) *jedoch* is rather more emphatic than *doch*:

Der Lohn ist karg, **doch** man genießt die
abendlichen Stunden (*Jens*)

*The wages are meagre, but one
enjoys the evening hours*

Im Allgemeinen war er kein guter Schüler,
jedoch in Latein war er allen überlegen

*In general he was not a good pupil,
but he was better than any in Latin*

(c) *aber*, *doch* and *jedoch* are also used as modal particles or adverbs

For *aber*, see 9.1.1, for *doch*, see 9.1.7. They have much the same meaning when used like this as when they are used as conjunctions, but they form part of the clause rather than introduce it, and the word order is different. Compare these alternatives to the sentences in (a) and (b):

Er runzelte die Stirn, sie **aber** sagte noch nichts

Er runzelte die Stirn, sie sagte **aber** noch nichts

Der Lohn ist karg, **doch** genießt man die abendlichen Stunden

Der Lohn ist karg, man genießt **doch** die abendlichen Stunden

..., in Latein **jedoch** war er allen überlegen

..., in Latein war er **jedoch** allen überlegen

Constructions like this highlight the contrast rather more than when these words are simply used as conjunctions. *aber* is often used like this if the verbs in the two clauses have the same subject, and the subject is then omitted in the second clause: *Er runzelte die Stirn, sagte aber noch nichts*.

(d) *sondern* ‘but’

(i) *sondern* contradicts a preceding negative:

Er ist nicht reich, **sondern** arm
Das Wasser darf nicht mehr getrunken werden,
sondern ist mindestens zehn Minuten lang

He is not rich, but poor
The water mustn't be drunk now
but has to be boiled for at least

sondern is distinct from *aber*, which is only used after a negative if it doesn't contradict, i.e. if the linked elements are equally true:

Er ist nicht reich, **aber** ehrlich *He is not rich, but (he is) honest*

(i.e. he is *both* 'not rich' *and* 'honest')

(ii) **nicht nur ... sondern auch** corresponds to 'not only ... but also':

Sie hatte zugegeben, daß sie den Lord in
Würzburg **nicht nur** gesehen, s **ondern**
auch gesprochen hatte (*Balden*)

*She had admitted that they hadn't
only seen the lord in Würzburg, but
also spoken to him*

Hierzu sind **nicht nur** Mitglieder, **sondern**
auch Gäste eingeladen (*BrZ*)

Not just members are invited to
this, but guests, too.

Nicht nur hat Helmut kräftig mitgeholfen,
sondern Franziska hat **auch** ihren Teil dazu
beigetragen

*It wasn't only Helmut who had
helped immensely, but Franziska
had done her bit too*

As the last example shows, initial *nicht nur* is followed immediately by the finite verb.

See 10.1.4 for the agreement of the finite verb if the subject consists of more than one noun or pronoun linked by *nicht nur ... sondern auch*.

17.1.2 *denn, nämlich*

denn and **nämlich** mean 'because', but, like the rather old-fashioned English 'for', they are coordinating, not subordinating conjunctions, and used in main clauses, with the verb in second position. Clauses with them give the reason for the event or action in the preceding clause, so they are never in first position in the sentence.

(a) **denn**

Wahrscheinlich hatte ich den Fremden angestarrt, denn er sah auf und lächelte (R. Schoof)	<i>I had probably been staring at the stranger because he looked up and smiled</i>
Wir wollten nicht länger draußen bleiben, denn es wurde langsam kalt	<i>We didn't want to stay outside any longer, as it was starting to get cold</i>

denn is perhaps becoming less common in spoken German, and *weil* is often heard in its place as a coordinating conjunction, followed by a main clause with the verb second. This is not regarded as acceptable in standard German, see 17.4.1.

(b) *nämlich* is always placed within the clause, after the verb

Er konnte sie nicht verstehen, er war nämlich taub	<i>He couldn't understand her, as he was deaf</i>
---	---

17.1.3 *oder, beziehungsweise, entweder ... oder, weder ... noch*

These are **disjunctive** conjunctions, giving alternatives. See 10.1.4 for the agreement of the finite verb if the subject consists of two or more nouns or pronouns linked by them.

(a) *oder* is the most frequent equivalent for English 'or'

Ich weiß, was passiert, wenn eine Warmfront oder eine Kaltfront vorbeiziehen (Grzimek)	<i>I know what happens when a warm front or a cold front go past</i>
Morgen können wir zu Hause bleiben, oder wir können einen Spaziergang machen, wenn du willst	<i>Tomorrow we can stay at home, or we can go for a walk if you want to</i>
Wir können in Heidelberg oder in Mannheim umsteigen	<i>We can change trains in Heidelberg or Mannheim</i>

Sie wollten das Haus aus- **oder** umbauen

*They wanted to extend or alter
the house*

oder can be ambiguous, like English ‘or’, since the alternatives linked by it can be **exclusive** (one or the other, but not both) or **inclusive** (i.e. ‘and/or’, as in the last example above). In order to confirm that exclusion is meant, *aber (auch)* can be added to *oder* (see 9.1.1b), e.g.:

Wir können in Heidelberg, **oder aber (auch)** in Mannheim umsteigen

Alternatively, *beziehungsweise* or *entweder ... oder* can be used to signal exclusion (see (b) and (c) below).

(b) *beziehungsweise* indicates mutually exclusive alternatives

In writing it is usually abbreviated to *bzw.*:

Sie haben lange in Deutschland
gewohnt, **bzw.** sie haben dort oft Urlaub
gemacht

*They lived a long time in Germany, or
(else) they often took their holidays
there*

Das Gerät kostet 300 Euro, **bzw.** 250
Euro mit Rabatt

*The appliance costs 300 euros, or 250
euros with the discount*

beziehungsweise was originally restricted to formal registers, but it is now commonly used in spoken German.

(c) *entweder ... oder* ‘either ... or’ signals mutually exclusive alternatives

Entweder er wird entlassen, **oder** er findet gar
keine Stellung (*BILD*)

*He will either be dismissed or not
find a job at all*

Less usually, *entweder* can be immediately followed by the verb, e.g. *Entweder*

wird er entlassen, oder ...

(d) *weder ... noch* ‘neither ... nor’

Er liest weder Bücher noch Zeitungen	<i>He reads neither books nor newspapers</i>
Ich habe weder seinen Brief	<i>Neither have I received his letter, nor</i>
bekommen, noch habe ich sonst von	<i>have I heard from him in any other way</i>
ihm gehört	

A common alternative to *weder ... noch* is to use ***und auch nicht/kein***. This is often felt to be less clumsy and more natural, especially in spoken German:

Er liest keine Bücher **und auch keine** Zeitungen

Ich habe seinen Brief nicht bekommen, **und** ich habe **auch nicht** sonst von ihm gehört

noch cannot be used on its own in the sense of ‘nor’ without a preceding *weder*. As an equivalent for English ‘nor’ without a preceding ‘neither’ (or ‘or’ preceded by a negative) German uses *und auch nicht/kein*:

Sie hat mir noch nicht geschrieben, und ich	<i>She hasn't written to me yet, nor</i>
erwarte auch nicht , dass ich bald von ihr höre	<i>do I expect to hear from her soon</i>
Ich höre die Nachrichten im Radio nicht und	<i>I don't listen to the news on the</i>
kaufe auch keine Zeitungen	<i>radio or buy newspapers</i>

17.1.4 *und, sowie, sowohl ... als*

(a) *und* is the common equivalent for English ‘and’

Angela **und** Gudrun wollen auch kommen
Einer der Verdächtigen durchbrach eine
Straßensperre **und** konnte erst nach einer
Verfolgungsjagd gestoppt werden (NZZ)

*Angela and Gudrun want to
come too
One of the suspects broke
through a road block and could
only be stopped after a chase*

(b) *sowie, sowohl ... als* ‘both ... and’, ‘as well as’

These are frequent stylistic alternatives to *und*, especially in written German, although they are not unknown in speech. They emphasize the connection between the elements more than *und*, and they are often used with a following *auch*:

Dürrenmatt hat **sowohl** Dramen **als (auch)**
Kriminalromane geschrieben

*Dürrenmatt wrote both plays
and detective novels*

Less commonly, *wie* is used for *als* with *sowohl*.

sowie puts rather more stress on the second element than *sowohl ... als*, e.g.:

Dürrenmatt hat Dramen **sowie (auch)** Kriminalromane geschrieben

Simple **wie** can also be used in the same contexts:

Das Haus wurde außen **wie** innen total renoviert

Dürrenmatt hat Dramen **wie (auch)** Kriminalromane geschrieben

See 12.1.4 for the agreement of the finite verb if the subject consists of more than one noun or pronoun linked by *sowohl ... als* or *sowie*.

17.1.5 Less frequent coordinating conjunctions

(a) *bald ... bald* ‘one moment ... the next’, ‘now ... now’

This is mainly used in formal written registers. *bald* is followed immediately by the verb in both clauses:

Bald weinte das Kind, **bald**
lachte es

*One moment the child was crying, the next it was
laughing*

(b) *teils ... teils* ‘partly ... partly’

Wir haben unseren Urlaub **teils** in Italien
verbracht, **teils** in der Schweiz
teils heiter, **teils** wolkig

*We spent our holiday partly in
Italy, partly in Switzerland
cloudy with sunny intervals*

When clauses are linked with *teils*, the verb follows immediately after *teils* in both clauses:

Teils war man sehr zuvorkommend,
teils hat man mich völlig ignoriert

*Sometimes people were very helpful, at
others I was completely ignored*

17.2 Noun clauses

Noun clauses have the same function in the sentence as nouns or noun phrases. They are most often found as complements of a verb, and for this reason they are also called **COMPLEMENT CLAUSES**.

They can be the subject (***Dass sie kommt**, freut mich*), object (*Sie sah, **wie er sich anstrengte***) or one of the other **complements** of a verb (see [Table 16.1](#)). If a noun clause is used as the **subject**, the verb has the third person singular endings, see 10.1.4a.

Noun clauses in German can be introduced by ***dass***, ***ob***, ***wenn*** or the interrogative **w** - **words** (see 7.6).

17.2.1 *dass* ‘that’

(a) *dass* is the commonest conjunction used in noun clauses

It corresponds closely to English ‘that’, and is used to introduce all kinds of complement clauses:

- **subject:** Dass sie morgen kommt, erstaunt mich
- **accusative object:** Sie hat mir versichert, dass alles in Ordnung sei
- **genitive object:** Man klagt ihn an, dass er das Geld gestohlen hat
- **prepositional object:** Er hat darauf gewartet, dass Peter ihn grüßte
- **predicate complement:** Tatsache ist, dass er gelogen hat

Noun clauses with *dass* can also **depend on adjectives**, e.g. *Ich bin froh, dass du kommen konntest* or on **nouns related to verbs**, e.g. *Ihn quälte die Angst, dass etwas passieren könnte.*

(b) The omission of *dass*

The conjunction *dass* can be omitted in some contexts and some types of noun clause, and the dependent clause then has the order of a main clause, with the verb second. Compare the following alternatives:

Sie sagte, **dass** sie einen Brief **schreibe**

Sie sagte, sie **schreibe** einen Brief

However, it is far less frequent for German *dass* to be dropped than English *that*. It is possible to leave *dass* out:

(i) after verbs (and other expressions) of saying, when introducing indirect speech (see 14.4):

Ich sagte, sie sei das einzige Mädchen, mit dem ich „diese Sache“ tun wollte (Böll) Bei denen herrscht die Meinung vor, die Universitäten litten an der Überlast ungeeigneter Studenten (Spiegel)	<i>I said she was the only girl I wanted to do “that” with</i> <i>With these people the idea is dominant that universities are suffering from being overloaded with unsuitable students</i>
---	---

The alternative without *dass* is frequent in both spoken and written German, although *dass* is usually retained if the main verb is negative. Thus *Er sagte nicht, dass er sie nach Hause fahren werde* is more usual than *Er sagte nicht, er werde sie nach Hause fahren*.

(ii) after verbs (and other expressions) of perceiving, feeling, hoping, thinking and believing (in the widest sense). The omission of *dass* in these contexts is commoner in spoken than in written German.

Ich hatte gehofft, er würde es auf zehn Mark abrunden (Böll)	<i>I had hoped he would round it down to ten marks</i>
diejenigen, die jetzt noch glaubten, man könne in Europa so fortfahren wie bisher (Presse)	<i>those who still believed even now that things could continue in Europe just as before</i>
die Ahnung, sie könnte noch unterwegs sein	<i>the idea that she could still be on her way</i>

(c) Initial *dass*-clauses are more frequent in German than in English

Especially in written German, it is much more usual to find sentences which begin with a subject or object *dass*-clause than is the case in English, where we tend to provide a noun (especially 'the fact') for the 'that'-clause to link to. Compare:

Dass die Wahlergebnisse der DDR gefälscht waren, bestreitet auch Modrow nicht (Spiegel)	<i>The fact that the election results in the GDR were falsified is not disputed even by Modrow</i>
Dass er einmal nicht mehr wollen würde, wagte er nicht zu hoffen (Walser)	<i>The possibility that at some time he wouldn't want to any more, was something he didn't dare to hope</i>

(d) *dass* should not be followed immediately by another

conjunction

Compare the following possibilities:

- (i) Sie sagte, dass er, wenn er am Wochenende kommen sollte, bei ihrer Mutter übernachten könnte
- (ii) Sie sagte, dass er bei ihrer Mutter übernachten könnte, wenn er am Wochenende kommen sollte
- (iii) Sie sagte, dass, wenn er am Wochenende kommen sollte, er bei ihrer Mutter übernachten könnte

Ordering similar to (iii) is very frequent in English, with an adverbial clause following straight after 'that', e.g. 'She said that if he were to come at the weekend he would be able to stay with her mother'.

However this ordering, although not unknown, is awkward in German, and it is considered preferable to insert at least the subject of the *dass*- clause, as in example (i), before starting a second clause, or to complete the *dass*- clause first, as in example (ii). English learners are strongly advised to avoid the construction exemplified in (iii).

(e) *dass*-clauses can be used in isolation

- (i) in commands or wishes (often with an 'ethic' dative, see 2.5.2d):

Dass du (mir) rechtzeitig nach Haus
kommst!

*Make sure you're not too late
home!*

- (ii) in exclamations:

Dass die es heute so eilig haben! *They are in a hurry today!*

17.2.2 Other conjunctions with noun clauses

(a) *ob* ‘whether’, ‘if’ typically indicates a question or a doubt

ob -clauses are all **indirect questions** and can have the following functions:

- **subject:** **Ob sie morgen kommt**, ist mir gleich
- **accusative object:** Sie vergaß, **ob sie eine Karte gekauft hatte**
- **prepositional object:** Ich erinnere mich nicht daran, **ob ich eine gekauft habe**
- **predicate complement:** Die Frage ist, **ob wir eine Tankstelle erreichen**

ob -clauses are often used in isolation, especially in spoken German, to ask a question:

Ob es in Schwerin noch Glocken gibt?
(*Surminski*)

*Are there still bells in
Schwerin?*

They are also used to pick up or repeat a question, or to express a general query or supposition:

Ja, **ob** das wirklich stimmt? *I wonder whether that's really right*

(b) *wenn* ‘when’, ‘if’

Noun clauses introduced by *wenn* can function as:

- **subject:** Mir ist es recht, **wenn sie heute nicht kommt**
- **accusative object:** Sie mag es nicht, **wenn ich sie bei der Arbeit störe**

The verb in noun clauses introduced by *wenn* can be in the *Konjunktiv II* form if

an unreal condition is involved, see 14.3.1, e.g. *Mir wäre es recht, wenn sie heute nicht käme*. Noun clauses with **wenn** always have an anticipatory *es* in the main clause, see 17.2.3.

(c) Interrogatives

All the **w - words** which can be used to ask questions (see 7.6) can also be used as conjunctions to introduce noun clauses. Noun clauses with *w-* words are all indirect questions and can function as:

- **subject:** Was sie dort macht, ist mir gleich
- **accusative object:** Sie vergaß, wie man es macht
- **prepositional object:** Ich erinnere mich nicht daran, wann ich es gehört habe
- **predicate complement:** Die Frage ist, wo sie es gekauft hat

17.2.3 Correlates to complement clauses

In German, a noun clause is often **linked to a pronoun in the main clause which anticipates it**. Such pronouns are called **correlates**, and their form differs depending on the function of the clause.

(a) The pronoun *es* functions as a correlate to subject and object clauses

Dann fiel es mir auf, dass sie plötzlich fehlte	<i>Then I noticed that all at once she wasn't there</i>
Ich bedaure es , dass sie nicht kommen konnte	<i>I regret that she couldn't come</i>

More details on this ‘correlating’ *es* are given in 3.6.2.

(b) The prepositional adverb as a correlate

The prepositional adverb, i.e. the form *da(r)* + preposition (see 3.5), can act as a correlate in the main clause to noun clauses functioning as prepositional objects:

die Angst davor , dass er vielleicht nicht entkommen könnte	<i>the fear of perhaps not being able to escape</i>
Er verlässt sich darauf , dass wir rechtzeitig kommen	<i>He’s relying on us arriving on time</i>

With many nouns, adjectives and verbs this use of the prepositional adverb is optional, see 6.4.1c and 16.5.14.

(c) *dessen*

The pronoun *dessen* can function as a correlate to noun clauses with the function of a genitive object. These constructions are infrequent in modern German, and largely restricted to formal registers. *dessen* is in all cases optional:

Ich bin mir (dessen) bewusst, dass ich ihn strafen sollte	<i>I am aware that I should punish him</i>
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17.3 Conjunctions of time

The main conjunctions which introduce adverbial clauses of time in German are given in [Table 17.2](#), together with an indication of the sub-sections where their use is explained.

[Table 17.2](#) Conjunctions of time

als	<i>when</i>	17.3.1	seit(dem)	<i>since</i>	17.3.5
bevor	<i>before</i>	17.3.2	sobald	<i>as soon as</i>	17.3.6
bis	<i>until, till, by the time</i>	17.3.2	solange	<i>as long as</i>	17.3.6
da	<i>when</i>	17.3.1	sooft	<i>as often as, whenever</i>	17.3.6
ehe	<i>before</i>	17.3.2	sowie	<i>as soon as</i>	17.3.6
indem	<i>as</i>	17.3.1	während	<i>while, whilst</i>	17.3.7
indes, indessen	<i>while, whilst</i>	17.3.7	wann, wenn	<i>when(ever)</i>	17.3.1
kaum (dass)	<i>hardly, scarcely</i>	17.3.3	wie	<i>as</i>	17.3.1
nachdem	<i>after</i>	17.3.4	wobei	<i>when</i>	17.3.8

17.3.1 *als, da, indem, wann, wenn, wie*

All these conjunctions are the equivalent of English ‘when’ (or ‘as’) in various contexts.

(a) Clauses with *als* refer to a single event in the past

als corresponds to English ‘when’ or ‘as’:

Als ich in Passau ankam, habe ich sie auf dem Bahnsteig gesehen	<i>When I arrived in Passau, I saw her on the platform</i>
Als ich weiterging, wurde ich immer müder	<i>As I went on, I grew more and more tired</i>
Als die Frau später ihre Arbeitspapiere vorlegen musste, kam die Wahrheit an den Tag (<i>BILD</i>)	<i>When, later on, the woman had to show her work documents, the truth came to light</i>

A main clause following an *als* -clause is sometimes (optionally) introduced by a correlating *da*, e.g. *Als ich in Passau ankam, da habe ich sie auf dem Bahnsteig gesehen.*

(b) *da* is a literary (and rather old-fashioned) alternative to *als*

Die Sonne schien an einem wolkenlosen Himmel, da er seinen Heimatort verließ (<i>Dürrenmatt</i>)	<i>The sun was shining in a cloudless sky as/when he left his home</i>
---	--

(c) *wie* can be used for ‘when’ with a verb in the present tense referring to a past action

i.e. with a ‘historic’ present (see 14.2.4). *wie* is an alternative to *als* in such contexts:

Als/Wie ich das Fenster öffne, schlägt mir heftiger Lärm entgegen	<i>As/When I opened the window, I was confronted by an intense noise</i>
--	--

The use of *wie* in place of *als* with a past or perfect tense is common in colloquial spoken German, especially in the South, e.g. **Wie** ich in Passau ankam/angekommen bin, ... This usage is occasionally found in writing, but it is not generally accepted as standard.

(d) *wann* is used in questions

wann is an interrogative adverb (= ‘when?’), see 7.6. As such, it is used to introduce questions in direct speech or in indirect speech (see 14.4.4), e.g.:

Wann kommst du heute Abend nach Hause? Er hat mich gefragt, wann ich heute Abend nach Hause komme	<i>When are you getting home tonight?</i> <i>He asked me when I was getting home tonight</i>
--	---

(e) Clauses with *wenn* refer to the present, the future, or to repeated actions

Wir können rasten, wenn wir den Gipfel erreichen Ich bringe es, wenn ich morgen vorbeikomme	<i>We can have a rest when we get to the top</i> <i>I’ll bring it when I drop by tomorrow</i>
--	--

Sie besucht uns immer, wenn sie nach Fulda kommt	<i>She always comes to see us when(ever) she's in Fulda</i>
--	---

A main clause following a *wenn* -clause can (optionally) be introduced by *dann*:

Wenn das Wasser ausgelaufen ist, (dann) schließt sich die Klappe automatisch	<i>When the water has run out, the valve shuts off automatically</i>
---	--

wenn often conveys the sense of English 'whenever', especially in the past, where *als* must be used if a single action is involved (see (a) above):

An den Bahnhöfen standen Grenzsoldaten und bewachten die Gleise, wenn die U-Bahn langsam mit geschlossenen Türen durchfuhr (MM)	<i>Border guards stood on the stations and watched the tracks when(ever) an underground train went through slowly with its doors closed</i>
---	---

wenn, not *als*, is used if there is a sense of a future-in-the-past:

Ich wollte zu Hause sein, wenn Karl ankam	<i>I wanted to be at home when Karl arrived</i>
--	---

wenn is also used in conditional clauses, i.e. = 'if' (see 14.4). If there is a possibility of ambiguity, *immer wenn* can be used to emphasize that the sense is that of 'whenever'. Alternatively, *falls* can be used to make it clear that 'if' is meant (see 14.3.3d).

(f) *indem* 'as' links simultaneous actions

Anna küsste ihre Mutter, indem sie die Palette und den nassen Pinsel in ihren Händen weit von ihr abhielt (Th. Mann)	<i>Anna kissed her mother, holding the palette and the wet brush well away from her in her hands</i>
---	--

This use of *indem*, where the *indem*- clause corresponds to an English 'ing' -phrase or a clause with 'while', is no longer frequent, even in literary registers. In modern German, *indem* is mainly used in the sense of English 'by' + '...ing', see 17.7c. German equivalents of English phrases with an 'ing'-form are treated in

11.6.

(g) Equivalents of English ‘when’ introducing relative clauses

e.g. *zu einer Zeit, wo ...* ‘at a time **when** ...’. For these, see 5.4.6b.

17.3.2 *bevor, ehe, bis*

For the occasional use of the subjunctive in clauses introduced by these conjunctions, see 14.5.4.

(a) *bevor* and *ehe* ‘before’

There is no real difference in meaning between *bevor* and *ehe*. *bevor* is far more frequent whilst *ehe* is typical of more formal registers, although it does occasionally occur in speech.

Der Kanzler muss das Volk befragen, bevor er einen Friedensvertrag unterzeichnet (<i>Presse</i>)	<i>The Chancellor has to ask the people before he signs/ before signing a Peace Treaty</i>
Es bestand, ehe die Erde geschieden war von den Himmeln (<i>Heym</i>)	<i>It existed before the earth was separated from the heavens</i>

bevor or *ehe* can be strengthened by *noch* to give the sense of ‘**even** before’, e.g. **Noch** *bevor / ehe sie zurückkam* ‘Even before she got back’.

(b) German equivalents for English ‘not ... before’, ‘not ... until’

(i) The simplest equivalent is *erst ...*, *wenn / als*:

Ich will erst nach Hause gehen, wenn Mutter wieder da ist	<i>I don't want to go home before/until mother gets back</i>
--	--

Das Kind hörte **erst** zu weinen auf, **als** es vor Müdigkeit einschlief *The child didn't stop crying until it was so tired that it fell asleep*

(ii) **Nicht** ... **bevor** (or *ehe*) and **nicht** ... **bis** are only used if the dependent clause implies a condition. An extra (redundant) *nicht* is often added:

Bevor er sich (nicht) entschuldigt hatte, wollte sie das Zimmer nicht verlassen	<i>She didn't want to leave the room before/until he had apologized</i>
Du darfst nicht gehen, bis du (nicht) deine Hausaufgaben fertig hast	<i>You can't go out until you've finished your homework</i>

If the subordinate clause precedes, then this second *nicht* is usually added, but the rule given by some authorities that *nicht* is only added then is not always followed in practice.

(c) **bis** has two main English equivalents

(i) 'until, till':

Ich warte hier, **bis** du zurückkommst *I'll wait here till you get back*

(ii) 'by the time (when)':

Bis du zurückkommst, habe ich das Fenster repariert	<i>I'll have fixed the window by the time you get back</i>
---	--

17.3.3 **kaum** (*dass*)

The most usual German equivalent for English 'hardly/scarcely ... when', 'no sooner ... than' is to use two main clauses, the first introduced by **kaum**, the second by **so** or **da**:

Kaum hatten wir das Wirtshaus erreicht,	<i>We had hardly reached the inn when it began to rain</i>
--	--

so/da begann es zu regnen

{ *No sooner had we reached the inn,
than it began to rain*

Alternatively, a main clause introduced by **kaum** followed by a subordinate clause with **als** can be used:

Kaum hatten wir das Wirtshaus erreicht, **als** es zu regnen begann

In formal written German, the phrasal conjunction **kaum dass** is sometimes used, although this now sounds rather old-fashioned:

Kaum dass wir das Wirtshaus erreicht hatten, begann es zu regnen

17.3.4 *nachdem*

Er wollte wissen, was mit Valette geschehen war, **nachdem** er sie das letzte Mal gesehen hatte (*Schneeweiß*)

He wanted to know what had happened to Valette after he had seen her last

Nachdem sie das Schiff verlassen hatten, suchte der junge Mann sofort nach einer Telefonzelle (*Balden*)

After they had left the ship the young man immediately looked round for a telephone box

nachdem is sometimes used in a causal sense, as an alternative to *da* (= ‘as, since’, see 17.4.1):

Damit soll die Produktion von 30.000 Neuwagen eingespart werden, **nachdem** die Nachfrage in Europa äußerst schleppend läuft (*Presse*)

With this the production of 30,000 new cars is to be stopped since demand in Europe is extremely sluggish

This usage is typical of South Germany and Austria, even in written registers, but it is not considered standard elsewhere.

For *je nachdem* ‘according as’, see 17.7e.

17.3.5 *seit, seitdem*

The shorter form *seit* was formerly restricted to colloquial registers, but it is now at least as frequent as *seitdem*, even in writing:

Seit(dem) er sein Haus verkauft hat, wohnt er in einem Hotel	<i>Since he sold his house, he's been living in a hotel</i>
Vertraut er ihr an, dass er unter Schreibstörungen leidet, seit er diesen Drehbuchauftrag bekommen hat? (Schoof)	<i>Will he confess to her that he has been suffering from writer's block since he got that commission for a screen-play?</i>

For the use of tenses in sentences with *seit (dem)*, see 14.2.2 and 14.3.4a.

17.3.6 *sobald, sowie, solange, sooft*

These conjunctions are always spelled as single words and are not normally followed by *als* or *wie*.

(a) *sobald* 'as soon as'

Sobald ich merkte, dass er gar nicht zuhörte, griff ich ihn am Ärmel (<i>Frisch</i>)	<i>As soon as I noticed he wasn't listening at all I grabbed him by the sleeve</i>
--	--

sowie is a frequent alternative to *sobald*, especially in less formal registers: **Sowie** ich etwas weiß, rufe ich dich an.

(b) *solange* 'as long as'

(i) *solange* can refer purely to time:

Wir haben gewartet, solange wir konnten Solange Leute da sind, werden wir Musik	<i>We waited as long as we could As long as there are people here we'll</i>
--	---

machen und ausschenken (MM)

make music and pour drinks

The sense of *solange* can approach that of *seit* (*dem*), as in the second example, and tense use is similar, see 12.1.2 and 12.2.4a.

(ii) It may have a conditional sense (= ‘provided that’), e.g.:

Solange er sein Bestes tut, bin ich
zufrieden

*As long as he does his best, I shall be
satisfied*

The conjunction *solange* is distinguished from the phrase *so lange* ‘so long’, which is written as two words:

Du hast uns **so lange** warten lassen, dass wir
den Zug verpasst haben

*You kept us waiting so long that
we missed the train*

So lange er auch wartete, es kam kein Zug
mehr

*However long he waited, no more
trains came*

(c) *sooft* corresponds to English ‘as often as’ or ‘whenever’

Du kannst kommen, **sooft** du willst
Sooft er kam, brachte er uns immer
Geschenke mit

*You can come as often as you want to
Whenever he came, he always brought
us presents*

17.3.7 *während* and alternatives

(a) *während* is the usual equivalent of English ‘while’, ‘whilst’

Like ‘while’, it can express time **or** a contrast (i.e. = ‘whereas’):

Die Zollprobleme löste Boris, **während**
wir in Urlaub waren (*Bednarz*)
Klaus Buch müsste auch sechsundvierzig

*Boris solved the problems with the
customs while we were on holiday
Klaus Buch ought to be forty-six as*

sein, **während** der vor ihm Stehende doch *well, whereas the man standing in*
eher sechsundzwanzig war (Walser) *front of him was more like twenty-six*

(i) **noch während** is used for ‘even as/whilst’, e.g. **Noch während** sie schlief ...
‘Even as she slept ...’

(ii) *während* is sometimes used with main clause word order (i.e. with the verb second) in colloquial speech. This usage is not accepted as standard.

(b) *indes* and *indessen*

These mean the same as *während d.* They are used chiefly in formal, especially literary registers.

Seine Glieder zitterten, **indes** er diese
grauenvolle Lust in sich erwürgte
(*Süßkind*)

*His limbs were trembling as he
throttled this terrible desire in
himself*

(c) *wohingegen* signals a contrast

It is used mainly in formal registers as an alternative to *während d.* It stresses the contrast more strongly and often corresponds to English ‘whereas’:

Auf fünf Stipendien hatten sich nur 18
Autoren beworben, **wohingegen** es im
Vorjahr noch 40 Kandidaten gewesen waren
(MM)

*Only 18 authors had applied for
five grants, whereas the previous
year there had been 40 candidates*

17.3.8 *wobei*

wobei introduces a clause with an action taking place at the same time as that of the main clause. It has no precise English equivalent, but a clause with *wobei* often corresponds to an English participial clause with an ‘ing’-form (see 11.6.3b),

or a main clause joined with ‘and’:

Nach Angaben der Polizei schlug der Mann sie ins Gesicht, wobei er sie verletzte (MM)	<i>According to the police the man struck her in the face, injuring her</i>
Es kam zur Kollision mit dem Wagen einer 24-Jährigen, wobei sich beide Fahrzeuge überschlugen (SGT)	<i>A collision occurred with a car driven by a 24-year-old woman, and both vehicles overturned</i>

wobei is often used with a following main clause construction (i.e. with the verb in second position rather than at the end), especially when it is used in a meaning close to that of ‘but’ or ‘although’: e.g. *Sie ist immer sehr freundlich, wobei ich muss sagen, dass das nicht jedem gefällt*. This is a non-standard feature of colloquial speech.

17.4 Causal conjunctions

German conjunctions expressing a cause or a reason are given in [Table 17.3](#) with an indication of the sub-sections in which their use is explained.

[Table 17.3](#) Causal conjunctions

da	<i>as, since</i>	17.4.1
nun (da/wo)	now that, seeing that	17.4.2
umso mehr, als	all the more because	17.4.3
weil	because	17.4.1
zumal	<i>especially as</i>	17.4.3

17.4.1 *da* and *weil*

The difference between *da* and *weil* is similar to that between English ‘as’ (or ‘since’) and ‘because’. *da* -clauses, like those with ‘as’ or ‘since’, usually precede the main clause and typically indicate a reason which is already known.

Ich musste zu Fuß nach Hause gehen, **weil** ich
die letzte Straßenbahn verpasst hatte
Weil dichter Nebel herrschte, konnten keine
Maschinen landen
Da er getrunken hatte, wollte er nicht fahren

*I had to walk home because I
had missed the last tram
Because there was thick fog, no
planes could land
As he'd had something to drink,
he didn't want to drive*

A *weil*-clause can be anticipated by *darum*, *deshalb* or *deswegen* in the preceding main clause, especially in spoken German. The effect is to give greater emphasis to the reason given in the *weil*-clause:

Er konnte **darum** / **deshalb** / **deswegen** nicht
kommen, **weil** er plötzlich krank geworden war

*He wasn't able to come
because he had suddenly got
sick*

In everyday spoken German *weil* is frequently heard with main clause word order, i.e. with the finite verb second rather than at the end of the clause:

Du musst langsamer sprechen, **weil**
der **versteht** nicht viel

*You'll have to speak more slowly because
he doesn't understand a lot*

This usage has become very widespread in recent years, but it is generally considered non-standard and unacceptable in writing.

denn and **nämlich** are also used to indicate a cause or a reason (i.e. in the sense of English 'because'). They are, however, **coordinating** conjunctions, with main clause word order, see 17.1.2.

17.4.2 *nun da*, etc.

Nun da wir alle wieder versammelt
sind, können wir das Problem weiter
besprechen

*Seeing/Now that we're all gathered
together again, we can carry on talking
about the problem*

There are several alternatives to *nun da*. Simple **nun** is occasionally found in

formal written registers:

Nun alles geschehen ist, bleibt nur zu wünschen, dass ... (FAZ)	<i>Now that everything has been done, one can only wish that ...</i>
---	--

Other alternatives, i.e. *nun wo*, *wo ... (doch)*, *da ... nun (mal)*, are typical of colloquial registers:

Nun wo du sowieso in die Stadt fährst, kannst du uns wohl mitnehmen, oder? Ich muss es wohl tun, wo ich es dir (doch) versprochen habe Da er das nun (mal) schon weiß, (so) muss ich ihm wohl das Weitere erzählen	<i>Seeing as you're going into town anyway, you'll be able to take us with you, won't you? I'll have to do it, seeing that I promised you Seeing that he already knows that, I'll have to tell him the rest</i>
--	---

17.4.3 Other causal conjunctions

(a) ***zumal*** is a stronger alternative to ***da***

It corresponds to English 'especially as':

Sie wird uns sicher helfen, zumal sie dich so gern hat Mehr verriet sie nicht, zumal es Stiller gar nicht wunderte, warum sie dieses Bedürfnis hatte (Frisch)	<i>She's sure to help us, especially as she's so fond of you She didn't reveal any more, especially as Stiller was not at all surprised why she felt this need</i>
---	--

(b) ***umso mehr ...***, ***als/da/weil*** correspond to 'all the more ... because'

Ich freute mich umso mehr über seinen	<i>I was all the more pleased about his</i>
--	---

Erfolg, als/da/weil er völlig unerwartet war	<i>success because it was totally unexpected</i>
Du musst früh ins Bett gehen, umso mehr als du morgen einen schweren Tag hast	<i>You've got to go to bed early, all the more because you've got a busy day tomorrow</i>

The construction with *umso ...* , *als* can be used with other comparatives:

Die Sache ist umso dringlicher, als/da die Iraner den Ölhahn zudrehen könnten	<i>The matter is all the more urgent because the Iranians might turn off the oil tap</i>
---	--

17.5 Conjunctions of purpose and result

German conjunctions indicating purpose or result (also called **final conjunctions** and **consecutive conjunctions** respectively) are given in [Table 17.4](#) with an indication of the sub-sections in which their use is explained.

[Table 17.4](#) Conjunctions of purpose and result

als dass	<i>for ... to</i>	17.5.3
auf dass	<i>so that</i> (purpose)	17.5.1
damit	<i>so that</i> (purpose)	17.5.1
derart dass	<i>so that</i> (consecutive)	17.5.2
so dass	<i>so that</i> (consecutive)	17.5.2

English learners need to note that ‘so that’ has two distinct senses, with different German equivalents:

- **Final** ‘so that’ expresses **purpose** and is an alternative to ‘in order that’. The usual German equivalent is **damit**, see 17.5.1.
- **Consecutive** ‘so that’ expresses a **result** and has the sense of ‘(in) such (a way) that’ and corresponds to German **so dass**, see 17.5.2.

17.5.1 Clauses of purpose

(a) *damit* is the most frequent conjunction in final clauses

Diese Tüte ist aus Papier, damit sie nicht aus Kunststoff ist	<i>This bag is made of paper so that it is not made of plastic</i>
König Ludwig ließ Wagner 40 000 Gulden auszahlen, damit sich der total verschuldete Meister bei seinen Gläubigern freikaufen konnte (SZ)	<i>King Ludwig had 40,000 guilders paid to Wagner so that the totally debt-ridden maestro could pay off his creditors</i>

The verb in *damit*- clauses is usually in the indicative in modern German. For the occasional use of the subjunctive, see 14.5.2a.

Infinitive clauses with *um ... zu* also have a final meaning (= ‘in order to’), see 11.2.6a.

(b) *auf dass* is an older alternative to *damit*

It is occasionally used nowadays for stylistic effect and has a very formal ring. It is always followed by a subjunctive, see 14.5.2b:

die elektronischen Medien, die moderne Eltern glauben dulden zu müssen, auf dass ihr Kind nicht zum Außenseiter in der Peer-Group gerate (FOCUS)	<i>the electronic media which modern parents believe they have to tolerate so that their child does not become an outsider in its peer group</i>
---	--

(c) Simple *dass* is sometimes used for *damit*

This usage is most often found in colloquial speech, but it is not unknown in formal writing, where it is sometimes used with a subjunctive:

I'll make you a couple of sandwiches so

Ich mache dir noch ein paar Brote, dass du unterwegs auch was zu essen hast	<i>that you've got something to eat on the journey</i>
Er entfernte sich leise, dass niemand ihn sehe, niemand ihn höre (<i>Süßkind</i>)	<i>He withdrew quietly, so that no-one should see him, no-one should hear him</i>

In colloquial German, *so dass* is sometimes used to introduce clauses of purpose. This usage is not considered standard.

17.5.2 Clauses of result

(a) *so dass* is the most frequent conjunction introducing clauses of result

so dass can alternatively be written as a single word (i.e. *sodass*), and this is the usual form in Austria.

Sein Bein war steif, so dass er kaum gehen konnte	<i>His leg was stiff, so (that) he could hardly walk</i>
Das Wetter war schlecht, so dass wir wenig wandern konnten	<i>The weather was bad, so (that) we couldn't do much hiking</i>
Er schob den Ärmel zurück, so dass wir die Narbe sehen konnten	<i>He pushed his sleeve back, so (that) we were able to see the scar</i>

The difference between consecutive clauses and final clauses is clear if we replace *so dass* by *damit* in the last example. *Er schob die Ärmel zurück, damit wir die Narbe sehen konnten* implies that he did it with the express intention that we should see the scar. With *so dass*, the fact that we could see the scar is only the (possibly unintentional) result of his action.

(b) In clauses of result with adjectives or adverbs, the *so* can precede these

This is very similar to the corresponding constructions in English. Compare the examples below to the first two examples in (a) above:

Sein Bein war so steif, dass er kaum gehen konnte	<i>His leg was so stiff that he could hardly walk</i>
Das Wetter war so schlecht, dass wir wenig wandern konnten	<i>The weather was so bad that we weren't able to do much hiking</i>

derart and (in some contexts) *dermaßen* are more emphatic alternatives to *so* in such contexts:

Er fuhr so/derart/dermaßen langsam, dass Frieda uns leicht einholte	<i>He drove so slowly that Frieda caught us up easily</i>
Es hat so/derart/dermaßen geregnet, dass wir schon Montag nach Hause gefahren sind	<i>It rained so much that we came home as early as Monday</i>

dermaßen is only possible if some idea of quantity is involved. Thus, only *derart* could replace *so* in: *Er hat den Ärmel so / **derart** zurückgeschoben, dass wir die Narbe sehen konnten.*

17.5.3 *als dass*

als dass is only used to introduce a clause after an adjective modified by **zu**, **nicht genug** or **nicht so**. The equivalent English sentences usually have an infinitive with 'for'. *Konjunktiv II*, particularly of a modal verb, is commonly used in these clauses, see 14.5.5a.

Er ist zu vernünftig, als dass ich das von ihm erwartet hätte	<i>He's too sensible for me to have expected that of him</i>
Es ist noch nicht so kalt, als dass wir jetzt schon die Heizung einschalten müssten	<i>It's not so cold for us to have to turn the heating on yet</i>
Das Kind ist nicht alt genug , als dass wir es auf einer so langen Reise mitnehmen könnten	<i>The child is not old enough for us to be able to take it with us on such a long journey</i>

In everyday speech, simpler constructions are preferred to sentences with *als* *dass*, e.g. *Es ist noch nicht so kalt, also brauchen wir die Heizung noch nicht einschalten*.

If the subject of the two clauses is the same, an infinitive clause with **um ... zu** is used rather than an *als dass*- clause (see 11.2.6a).

17.6 Concessive conjunctions

Concessive conjunctions typically include the equivalents for English ‘(al)though’ (see section 17.6.1), and the forms which correspond to English ‘however’, ‘where(so)ever’, etc. (see section 17.6.2). Conditional concessive conjunctions (*selbst wenn*, *auch wenn*, *sogar wenn*, *wenn ... auch* = English ‘even if’) are treated in 16.5.3d.

17.6.1 German equivalents for English ‘(al)though’

(a) **obwohl** is the commonest concessive conjunction in current usage

Obwohl sie Schwierigkeiten mit dem Reißverschluss hatte, stand ich nicht auf, ihr zu helfen (Böll)	<i>Although she was having difficulties with her zip, I didn't stand up to help her</i>
---	---

If the *obwohl*- clause comes first, the contrast can be emphasized by using **(so) ... doch** in the main clause:

Obwohl ich unterschrieben hatte, (so) blieb sie doch sehr skeptisch	<i>Although I had signed, she still remained very sceptical</i>
--	---

Less commonly, the contrast may be stressed by putting the verb second in the

following main clause:

Obwohl er mein Cousin ist, ich kann nichts für ihn tun	<i>Although he is my cousin, I can't do anything for him</i>
---	--

obwohl is occasionally used with the word order of a main clause, i.e. with the verb second: *Sie kann ihn sehen, obwohl es ist sehr dunkel*. This usage is increasing, especially in spoken German, but it is not accepted as standard.

(b) Other concessive conjunctions

(i) **obgleich** is a frequent alternative to *obwohl*:

Ein Wunsch eint sie, obgleich sie alle wissen, dass kein Geld mehr da ist (MM)	<i>One wish unites them although they all know that there's no more money there</i>
---	---

(ii) **obschon** is quite common in Swiss usage:

Über ihre Zukunft machen sie sich wenig Sorgen, obschon sie sich der hohen Arbeitslosigkeit im Land bewusst sind (NZZ)	<i>They are not very worried about their future although they are aware of the high unemployment in the country</i>
--	---

(iii) **trotzdem** is sometimes used as a conjunction to mean 'although':

Ich hab die jungen Herrschaften auch gleich erkannt, trotzdem es ein bisschen dunkel ist (Th. Mann)	<i>I recognized the young master and mistress immediately although it is a little dark</i>
--	--

The use of *trotzdem* as a conjunction is widely considered a non-standard colloquialism, and many Germans think it should be avoided in writing.

(iv) A common alternative way to express concession is a construction with **zwar** ... **aber**, i.e. with two main clauses. The first one contains the particle *zwar* (see 9.1.35a), and the second is introduced by *aber*:

Bei den Hotlines gab es zwar laufend Anrufe, aber keine größeren Störfälle (<i>Presse</i>)	<i>Although there was a stream of calls to the hotlines, there weren't any major breakdowns</i>
--	---

(v) Other alternatives to *obwohl* are used occasionally in written German, roughly in the following descending order of frequency: *wenngleich*, *wiewohl*, *obzwar*.

17.6.2 Clauses of the type ‘however’, ‘whoever’, ‘whenever’, etc.

(a) The usual German equivalent for these is *wie ... auch*, *wer ... auch*, etc.

i.e. the clause is introduced by one of the interrogative pronouns (see 5.3) or the interrogative adverbs (see 7.6), and the particle *auch* is placed later in the clause:

Wer er auch ist, ich kann nichts für ihn tun	<i>Whoever he is, I can't do anything for him</i>
Wann sie auch ankommt, ich will sie sofort sprechen	<i>Whenever she arrives, I want to speak to her immediately</i>
Wohin sie auch hingeht, ich werde ihr folgen	<i>Wherever she may go, I shall follow her</i>
Wo er sich auch zeigte, er wurde mit Beifall begrüßt	<i>Wherever he showed himself, he was greeted with applause</i>

As the examples show, a main clause following these concessive clauses usually has normal word order, with the verb second, see 19.2.1c. Other features of this type of concessive clause:

(i) The modal verb *mögen* often occurs in these clauses, especially in more formal registers, e.g. *Wer er auch sein mag*, ...; *Wann sie auch ankommen mag*, ... etc. (see 15.4.3).

(ii) In modern German, the indicative mood is used in clauses of this type. The subjunctive still occurs occasionally, but it can sound affected, except in the set

phrase *Wie dem auch sei* ‘However that may be’.

(iii) *auch* can be strengthened by adding *immer*, e.g. *Wo er sich auch immer zeigte*, ... Alternatively, *immer* can be used on its own. It always follows the interrogative, e.g. *Wo immer er sich zeigte* ...

(b) *so/wie ... auch* corresponds to English ‘however’ followed by an adjective or an adverb

So/Wie gescheit er auch sein mag, für diese Stelle passt er nicht	<i>However clever he may be, he’s not right for this job</i>
So/Wie teuer das Bild auch ist/sein mag, ich will es doch kaufen	<i>However dear the picture is, I’m still going to buy it</i>
So höhnisch die Antwort Vittlars auch sein mochte, gab sie mir dennoch mehr Gewissheit (Grass)	<i>However scornful Vittlar’s answer may have been, it still gave me more certainty</i>

Similarly *sosehr ... auch* is usual for ‘however much’:

Sosehr das Publikum die feurigen Latinorhythmen auch beklatschte, getanzt wurde nicht (MM)	<i>However much the public clapped in time to the fiery Latin rhythms, nobody danced</i>
--	--

noch so can be used in a concessive sense with a following adjective. Compare the following alternative for the first example above: *Er mag noch so gescheit sein, für diese Stelle passt er nicht*.

(c) *was für (ein) or welcher ... auch* corresponds to ‘whatever’ with a noun

Was für Schwierigkeiten du auch hast, es ist der Mühe wert	<i>Whatever difficulties you may have, it’s worth the trouble</i>
diese Vorgänge, von welcher Seite man sie auch betrachtet (SZ)	<i>these events, from whatever side one considers them</i>

aus **welchem** Land **auch immer**
aus **welchem** Grund **auch immer**

from whatever country
for whatever reason

17.7 Conjunctions of manner and degree

(a) *als* and *wie* introduce comparative clauses

For the use of *als* and *wie* generally in comparatives, see 6.5.2:

Wir fahren schneller, **als** du denkst
Der Vortrag war nicht so interessant, **wie**
ich erwartet hatte

*We're travelling faster than you
think
The lecture was not as interesting as
I had expected*

Clauses expressing unreal comparisons with ***als ob/wenn*** (= 'as if') are explained in 14.5.1. For *je ... umso/desto* 'the more ... the more', see 6.5.2g.

(b) *außer dass* and *außer wenn*

(i) ***außer dass*** corresponds to English 'except that'

Ich habe nichts herausfinden können,
außer dass er erst im April zurückkommt

*I couldn't find anything out, except
that he's not coming back till April*

An infinitive clause with ***außer ... zu*** can be used if the subjects of the two clauses are the same, see 11.2.6d.

(ii) ***außer wenn*** corresponds to English 'except when' or 'unless'

Wir gingen oft im Gebirge wandern,
außer wenn es regnete
Du brauchst die Suppe nicht zu essen,

*We often used to go hiking in the
mountains, except when/unless it was
raining*

außer wenn du sie wirklich magst *You don't need to eat the soup, unless you really like it*

Simple **außer** is often used for *außer wenn*, especially in colloquial speech. It is followed by the word order of a main clause, with the verb second, e.g. *Wir gehen morgen im Gebirge wandern, außer es regnet.*

For other equivalents for English 'unless', see 14.3.3d.

For **anstatt dass** 'instead of', see 11.2.6c.

(c) **dadurch dass** and **indem** have instrumental meaning

Their usual English equivalent is 'by' followed by the 'ing'-form of the verb, see also 11.6.2a:

Er hat sich dadurch gerettet, dass er aus dem Fenster sprang	}	<i>He saved himself by jumping out of the window</i>
Er hat sich gerettet, indem er aus dem Fenster sprang		
Man kann dadurch Unfälle vermeiden helfen, dass man die Verkehrsvorschriften beachtet	}	<i>One can help to avoid accidents by observing the highway code</i>
Man kann Unfälle vermeiden helfen, indem man die Verkehrsvorschriften beachtet		

This is the only current use of *indem* in modern German. Its use in time clauses, see 17.3.1f, is now obsolete.

(d) **insofern (als)**, **insoweit (als)**, **sofern**, **soviel**, **soweit**

These are all very close in meaning.

(i) **insofern (als)** and **insoweit (als)** correspond to English '(in) so/as far as' or 'inasmuch as'

Ich werde dir helfen, **insofern (als)** ich kann/
insoweit (als) ich kann

*I'll help you in so far as
I'm able to*

insofern and *insoweit* can be placed within a preceding main clause, especially qualifying an adjective or adverb. In this case they **must** be used with a following *als*:

Diese Verhandlungen werden **insofern/**
insoweit schwierig sein, **als** es sich um ein
ausgesprochen heikles Problem handelt

*These negotiations will be difficult,
inasmuch as we're dealing with an
extremely delicate problem*

The use of *insofern* with a following *weil* or *dass* rather than *als* is frequent in colloquial registers, but not accepted as standard.

(ii) **soweit** usually has the sense of '(in) so/as far as'/'as much as'. In this sense *soweit* is an alternative to *insofern/insoweit (als)*:

Ich werde dir helfen, **soweit** ich kann
Soweit ich die Lage beurteilen kann,
muss ich ihm Recht geben

*I'll help you as much as I can
In so far as I can judge the situation,
I've got to admit he's right*

soweit can sometimes be used in a conditional sense. In such contexts it is an alternative to *sofern*, see below and 14.3.3d:

Soweit/Sofern noch Interesse besteht,
wollen wir schon morgen damit anfangen

*Provided there's still interest, we're
going to make a start tomorrow*

Note that 'as far as I know' is: **soviel** ich weiß.

(iii) **sofern** usually has a conditional sense, corresponding to English 'provided that' or 'if'. See also 14.3.3d.

Sofern wir es im Stadtrat durchsetzen
können, wird die neue Straße bald
gebaut

*Provided (that)/If we can get it through
the town council, the new road will soon
be built*

(e) *je nachdem* ‘according to’, ‘depending on’

je nachdem is normally used with a following *ob* or an interrogative:

Je nachdem, ob es ihm besser geht oder nicht, wird er morgen verreisen	<i>Depending on whether he’s better or not, he’ll leave tomorrow</i>
Je nachdem, wann wir fertig sind, werden wir hier oder in der Stadt essen	<i>Depending on when we get finished, we’ll eat here or in town</i>
Je nachdem, wie das Wetter wird, werden wir am Montag oder am Dienstag segeln gehen	<i>According to what the weather is like, we’ll go sailing on Monday or Tuesday</i>

je nachdem often occurs in isolation, e.g.:

Kommst du morgen mit? Na, **je nachdem** *Are you coming tomorrow? Well, it depends*

(f) *nur dass* ‘only (that)’

In der neuen Schule hat er sich gut eingelebt, nur dass seine Noten etwas besser sein könnten	<i>He’s settled down well at his new school, only his marks could be a bit better</i>
--	---

A main clause introduced by *nur* is often preferred to *nur dass* in spoken German, e.g. *In der neuen Schule hat er sich gut eingelebt, nur könnten seine Noten etwas besser sein.*

(g) *ohne dass* ‘without’

ohne dass must be used for English ‘without’ followed by an ‘ing’ - form if the subordinate clause has a different subject from the main clause. The subjunctive is often used in these clauses, see 14.5.5a:

Er verließ das Zimmer, ohne dass wir es merkten	<i>He left the room without our/us noticing</i>
--	---

Sie haben mir sofort geholfen, **ohne dass** ich
sie darum bitten musste/müsste

*They helped me immediately
without my having to ask them*

If the subjects of the two clauses are the same, an infinitive clause with **ohne ... zu** can be used for English 'without' + '...ing', see 11.6.2f.

Prepositions

PREPOSITIONS are a small class of words which combine with a following **noun phrase** to form a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**. Prepositional phrases often express notions of time, place and direction and are typically (but not only) used as **ADVERBIALS**.

In German, the **noun phrase following each preposition is in a particular CASE** – we say that the preposition ‘governs’ a particular case. Most German prepositions govern the dative or the accusative case. Prepositions governing the genitive are mainly restricted to formal registers. One important group of common prepositions is followed by the accusative **or** the dative case, with a difference in meaning. [Table 18.1](#) gives the most important German prepositions, with the case they govern.

[Table 18.1](#) The main German prepositions and their cases

accusative	bis durch für gegen ohne um
dative	aus außer bei gegenüber mit nach seit von zu
accusative or dative	an auf hinter in neben über unter vor zwischen
genitive	(an)statt entlang trotz während wegen

This chapter explains the use of all the prepositions of German, ordered according to the case they govern:

- prepositions governing the **accusative** (section 18.1)
- prepositions governing the **dative** (section 18.2)
- prepositions governing the **dative** or the **accusative** (section 18.3)
- prepositions governing the **genitive** (section 18.4)
- German equivalents for English ‘to’ (section 18.5)

The most important literal and figurative senses of each preposition are treated together.

Some uses of prepositions are dealt with in detail elsewhere in the book, as indicated below:

- the use of prepositions after **adjectives** (section 6.3.2)
- prepositions with verbs – **prepositional objects** (section 16.5)
- the **contraction** of some prepositions with the definite article, e.g. *am*, *ins* (section 4.1.1c)
- the **prepositional adverb**, e.g. *darauf*, *damit* (section 3.5)

18.1 Prepositions governing the accusative case

Six common prepositions are used with the accusative:

bis durch für gegen ohne um

The following are less frequent and are treated together in 18.1.7:

à	betreffend	eingerechnet	pro	wider
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The preposition ***entlang*** is also often used with the accusative, but case usage

with it is very variable and appears to be changing rapidly. Modern usage is outlined in section 18.4.2.

18.1.1 *bis*

In practice, ***bis*** is rarely used as a preposition in its own right. It is never followed by an article (or any determiner), and it is used on its own only with names, adverbs and some time phrases. Otherwise it is followed by another preposition which determines the case of the following noun.

(a) Referring to place, ***bis*** means ‘as far as’, ‘(up) to’

(i) Followed by names of places and adverbs ***bis*** is used **without an article**. In practice the case of the following noun is never obvious:

Ich fahre nur **bis** Frankfurt *I’m only going as far as Frankfurt*

Bis dahin gehe ich mit *I’ll go that far with you*

bis hierher und nicht weiter *so far and no further*

With names of towns, cities and countries, ***bis*** or ***bis nach*** can be used. The latter is more emphatic: *Wir fahren bis (nach) Freiburg, von Köln bis (nach) Aachen.*

(ii) If the following noun has an article, **an appropriate preposition must follow** (usually the appropriate equivalent of English ‘to’, see 18.5):

Wir gingen bis zum Waldrand	
Sie ging bis zur Tür	<i>We went as far as the edge of the forest</i>
Sie ging bis an die Tür	<i>She went up to the door</i>
Sie standen im Wasser bis an die Knie	<i>She went right up to the door</i>
	<i>They were standing in water up to their knees</i>
Sie standen im Wasser bis über die Knie	<i>They were standing in water coming up over their knees</i>

bis hin zu den Wanzen im
Gesicht (*Borst*)
Er stieg **bis aufs** Dach
bis über die Ohren verschuldet

right down to the warts on his face
He climbed right onto the roof
up to one's ears in debt

bis zu can be used in the sense of 'up to' with quantities, e.g. *Bis zu dreißig Kinder nahmen an dem Ausflug teil.* See 8.1.6 for further details of this usage and the distinction between the adverbial and prepositional usage of *bis zu* with quantities.

(b) Referring to time, *bis* means 'until' or 'by'

(i) *bis* indicates an **end-point in time** and can correspond to English 'until' or 'by':

Bis 2010 hat er in Wien gelebt	<i>Until 2010 he lived in Vienna</i>
Das Geschäft ist von 9 Uhr bis 18.30 Uhr durchgehend geöffnet	The shop is open continuously from 9 a.m. until 6.30 p.m.
Ich werde es bis heute Abend/ bis Montag fertig haben	<i>I'll have it finished by tonight / by Monday</i>
bis nächste Woche, nächstes Jahr bis dahin/ bis dann	until next week, next year by then, until then
bis jetzt, bis anhin (Sw.)	up to now
Bis dahin bin ich längst zurück	<i>I'll be back long before then</i>

(ii) With **days of the week**, **months** and **dates**, *bis* can be used with or without a following *zu* (and the definite article):

bis (zum) Freitag	<i>by/until Friday</i>
bis (zum) 11. Juni	by/until the 11th of June
Bis (zum) kommenden Montag kannst du mich hier erreichen	<i>You can reach me here till next Monday</i>

(iii) In other contexts ***bis* must be followed by *zu*** (or another appropriate preposition) with the definite article:

bis zum 18. Jahrhundert	<i>until/by the 18th century</i>
bis zu seinem Tode	until his death
bis vor kurzem	until recently
Bis vor zwei Wochen war er hier	He was here until two weeks ago
Ich arbeite bis gegen Mittag im Büro	I'm working at the office until about noon
Wir wollen es bis auf weiteres verschieben	We'll postpone it for the present
bis tief/spät in die Nacht hinein	<i>till late at night</i>

A date following a phrase with *bis* and a weekday is in the accusative, e.g. *bis Montag, den 5. September*. In other contexts, the date is in the dative, e.g. *bis morgen, dem 11. November*.

erst is used for 'not until', e.g. *Er kommt erst am Montag*, see 9.1.12.

bis is used in leave-taking phrases: *Bis gleich! Bis bald! Bis morgen! Bis nächste Woche!*

(c) *bis auf* (+ acc.) means 'down to (and including)' or 'all but', 'except'

Die Kabinen waren mit 447 Passagieren bis auf das letzte Klappbett belegt (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>With 447 passengers, the cabins were full down to the last camp bed</i>
Bis auf drei kamen alle Insassen ums Leben	<i>All but three of the passengers were killed</i>

bis auf can be ambiguous: *Der Bus war bis auf den letzten Platz besetzt* can mean 'The bus was full down to the last seat' or 'The bus was full except for the last seat'.

18.1.2 *durch*

(a) *durch* means 'through', referring to place

Sie ging **durch** die Stadt *She went through the city*

Er atmete **durch** den Mund *He was breathing through his mouth*

mitten **durch** den Park (see 7.1.3) *through the middle of the park*

durch is often strengthened by adding *hindurch*, see 7.2.4, e.g. *Wir gingen **durch** den Wald **hindurch*** ‘We went (right) through the forest’.

It can also be used for English ‘across’, especially with a preceding *quer*. This can give the sense of ‘crosswise’, ‘diagonally’, but it is often used simply to strengthen *durch* (i.e. = ‘right through’):

Wir wateten (**quer**) **durch** den Fluss
im Rahmen ihrer Frühlingstournee **quer**
durch Deutschland (MM)

*We waded across the river
in the course of their spring tour
right across Germany*

(b) *durch* can be used in the sense of English ‘throughout’

(i) This is its usual sense when it refers to time, in which case it can be strengthened by adding *hindurch*, e.g. ***durch** viele Generationen (**hindurch**)* ‘throughout many generations’.

(ii) *hindurch* can be used without a preceding *durch* for ‘throughout’ after an accusative phrase of time with *ganz*, see 2.2.2a:

den ganzen Winter **hindurch**
die ganze Nacht **hindurch**

*throughout the winter
throughout the night*

durch can also be used on its own after the noun in this meaning: *die ganze Nacht **durch***.

(iii) A phrase with *ganz* and an appropriate preposition is needed to give the sense of English ‘throughout’ referring to place, e.g.:

im **ganzen** Land *throughout the country*

durch die **ganze** Stadt *throughout the town*

(c) *durch* is used to express means

This use of *durch* is related to its use for ‘by’ in passive sentences, see 13.3.

(i) *durch* indicates the means through whom or which an action is carried out:

Durch harte Arbeit hat er sein Ziel erreicht	<i>He attained his aim by (means of) hard work</i>
Er ist durch einen Unfall ums Leben gekommen	He was killed in an accident through his own fault
durch seine eigene Schuld	<i>I learnt of it by chance</i>
Ich habe es durch Zufall erfahren	

(ii) *durch* in this sense corresponds to ‘by’ with a verbal noun:

die Annahme des Kaisertitels durch den König	<i>the assumption of the title of emperor by the king</i>
die Erfindung des Verbrennungsmotors durch Benz und Daimler	<i>the invention of the internal combustion engine by Benz and Daimler</i>

durch with a verbal noun often corresponds to English ‘by’ with an ‘ing’-form, see 11.6.2a, e.g. *durch Betätigung des Mechanismus* ‘by activating the mechanism’.

(iii) The prepositional adverb **dadurch** often has the sense of ‘thereby’:

Was willst du dadurch erreichen?	<i>What do you hope to gain by that?</i>
Meinst du, dadurch wird alles wieder gut?	<i>Do you think that will make everything all right again?</i>

For the compound conjunction **dadurch, dass** ‘by ...ing’ see 17.7c.

18.1.3 *für*

(a) *für* corresponds to English ‘for’ in a wide range of senses

i.e. where ‘for’ has the meaning of ‘on behalf of’ and the like, e.g.:

Er hat viel **für** mich getan *He’s done a lot for me*

Das wäre genug **für** heute *That’ll be enough for today*

Das war sehr unangenehm **für** mich *That was very unpleasant for me*

Für einen Ausländer spricht er recht gut Deutsch *He speaks pretty good German for a foreigner*

Das ist kein Buch **für** Kinder *That’s not a book for children*

Ich habe es **für** zehn Euro gekriegt *I got it for ten euros*

für is used idiomatically in *ein Sinn, ein Beispiel für etwas* ‘a sense, an example of sth.’

Where English ‘for’ expresses **purpose**, its usual German equivalent is *zu*, see 18.2.9d.

(b) *für* indicates a period of time extending from ‘now’

In this sense, it corresponds to English ‘for’:

Ich habe das Haus für sechs Monate gemietet	<i>I’ve rented the house for six months</i>
Am nächsten Tag fuhren wir für einen Monat in den Schwarzwald	<i>The next day we went to the Black Forest for a month</i>

auf (+ accusative) is a less common alternative in this meaning, used chiefly in formal registers and set expressions, see 18.3.5c.

Less frequently, a phrase with *für* is used to refer to a period of time lying entirely in the past or future, e.g. *Nur während der Wintermonate blieb er für längere Zeit an einem Ort* (Bumke). An accusative phrase is more usual in this meaning, see (c) below.

The use of *für* is idiomatic in *Tag für Tag* ‘day by day’.

(c) German equivalents of English ‘for’ referring to time

(i) a phrase in the accusative case (see 2.2.2a) used to denote a period of time lying entirely in the past or future, e.g. *Er blieb einen Monat (lang) in Berlin* ‘He remained in Berlin for a month’. The phrase is often followed by *lang*.

In spoken registers an accusative phrase is often used rather than *für* to refer to a period of time extending from the present, e.g. *Ich gehe eine halbe Stunde (lang) ins Cafe*.

(ii) *seit* refers to a period of time which began in the past and extends up to the present, e.g. *Ich warte seit einer Stunde auf dich* ‘I’ve been waiting for you for an hour’. See 18.2.7 for further details.

(iii) *für* (or more formal *auf*) to refer to a period of time, as illustrated in (b) above.

18.1.4 *gegen*

(a) Referring to place or opposition, *gegen* means ‘against’

Er warf den Ball gegen die Mauer	<i>He threw the ball against the wall</i>
gegen den Strom schwimmen	swim against the current
Sie verteidigte sich gegen diese Leute	<i>She defended herself against those people</i>

The prepositional adverb *dagegen* indicates opposition, e.g.:

Hast du was dagegen , wenn wir früher anfangen?	<i>Do you have any objection to our starting earlier?</i>
--	---

Note the different idiomatic usage: *Ich brauche Tabletten **gegen** Kopfschmerzen*,

but: 'I need tablets **for** a headache'.

(b) *gegen* can indicate direction

(i) *gegen* often corresponds to 'into':

Er fuhr gegen einen Baum	<i>He drove into a tree</i>
Wir müssen aufpassen, dass wir nicht gegen die Kraterwände fliegen (Grzimek)	<i>We've got to watch out that we don't fly into the sides of the crater</i>

(ii) In some contexts *gegen* has the sense of 'towards':

Michael will die Maschine mit dem Propeller gegen die flache Böschung am Seeufer drehen (Grzimek)	<i>Michael intends to turn the aeroplane with the propellor towards the slight incline on the lake shore</i>
--	--

The use of *gegen* in the sense of 'towards' with the points of the compass is obsolete. For older *gegen Norden fahren* one now finds **nach** *Norden fahren*, see 18.2.6. The form *gen* (e.g. *gen Norden fahren*) is restricted to elevated literary registers and sounds archaic.

Note the difference from English usage in *etwas gegen das Licht halten* 'hold sth. up to the light'.

(c) *gegen* can express a contrast (= 'contrary to', 'compared with')

Ich handelte gegen seinen Befehl gegen alle Erwartungen	<i>I acted against/contrary to his orders against/contrary to all expectations</i>
Gegen meine Schwester bin ich groß gegen früher	<i>I'm tall compared to my sister compared to formerly</i>

(d) *gegen* can have the sense of '(in exchange/return) for'

Er gab mir das Geld **gegen** eine Quittung
Ich will meine Digitalkamera **gegen** einen
HD-Camcorder eintauschen

*He gave me the money in exchange
for a receipt
I want to exchange my digital
camera for an HD camcorder*

(e) *gegen* can express approximation (= ‘about’)

Es waren **gegen** (or etwa, or an die) 500
Zuschauer im Saal

*There were about 500 spectators
in the hall*

(f) *gegen* is used after a number of nouns and adjectives

See also 6.4.1. These nouns or adjectives mostly involve a mental attitude ‘towards’ something or someone, e.g.:

die Abneigung gegen	<i>aversion towards</i>	die Grausamkeit gegen	<i>cruelty towards</i>
der Hass gegen	hatred of	das Misstrauen gegen	distrust of
argwöhnisch gegen	suspicious of	gleichgültig gegen	<i>indifferent to</i>
gesichert gegen	<i>secure against</i>		

seine Pflicht gegen seine Eltern
sein Verhalten gegen seinen Chef
rücksichtslos/rücksichtsvoll gegen

*his duty towards his parents
his attitude to(wards) his boss
(in)considerate towards*

With some of these nouns and adjectives *gegenüber* or *zu* may be a possible alternative to *gegen*, see 18.2.4d and 18.2.9g.

(g) Referring to time, *gegen* means ‘about’ or ‘towards’

It can be ambiguous, especially with clock times (see 8.5.1), as some Germans understand *gegen zwei Uhr* to mean ‘at about two o’clock’, while others interpret it as ‘just before two o’clock’. In other phrases it usually has the meaning ‘towards’. It is normally used without an article in time expressions:

gegen Mittag, gegen Abend *towards noon, towards evening*

gegen Monatsende *towards the end of the month*

gegen Ende des Jahrhunderts *towards the end of the century*

18.1.5 *ohne*

In most contexts *ohne* corresponds to English ‘without’:

Das tat er ohne mein Wissen	<i>He did it without my knowledge</i>
Er geht selten ohne Schirm	He rarely goes walking without an umbrella
Das haben wir ohne große Schwierigkeiten erledigt	<i>We managed it without too much difficulty</i>

ohne can be used idiomatically on its own in colloquial speech:

Der Wein ist nicht **ohne** *The wine's got quite a kick*

Er ist gar nicht so **ohne** *He's got what it takes*

After the combination *mit oder ohne* it is nowadays acceptable to ignore the usual rule that the noun phrase must be repeated after prepositions which govern different cases. It is thus not necessary to say or write *mit Kindern oder ohne Kinder* or *mit ihm oder ohne ihn* because *mit oder ohne Kinder* or *mit oder ohne ihn* is acceptable.

ohne is used with **no determiner** in many contexts where English has an indefinite article or a possessive, see 4.10.

For the use of *ohne* in **infinitive clauses** (i.e. *ohne ... zu*), see 11.2.6b; for the conjunction *ohne dass*, see 17.7g.

18.1.6 *um*

(a) Referring to place, *um* means ‘(a)round’, ‘about’

Wir standen **um** den Teich *We were standing (a)round the pond*

Er kam **um** die Ecke *He came (a)round the corner*

Sie sah **um** sich *She looked round (in all directions)*

um can be strengthened by adding *rund*, *rings* or *herum* (see 7.2.4b):

Wir standen **rings/rund um** den Tisch *or um* den Tisch **herum**

Er kam **um** die Ecke **herum**

Sie sah **um** sich **herum**

(b) *um* referring to time

(i) *um* corresponds to English ‘at’ with clock times, e.g. *um vier Uhr* ‘at four o’clock’, etc. (see 8.5.1).

(ii) With other time words *um* expresses approximation. It corresponds to English ‘around’ or ‘about’ and is often used with *herum* following the noun:

um Mitternacht (herum)	<i>around midnight</i>
um Ostern (herum)	round about Easter time
um 1890 (herum)	around 1890
die Tage um die Sommersonnenwende (herum)	<i>the days either side of the summer solstice</i>

um diese Zeit is ambiguous. It can mean ‘at this time’ or ‘around this time’. Adding *herum*, i.e. *um diese Zeit herum*, makes it clear that the second meaning is intended.

(iii) Idiomatic time phrases with *um*:

Stunde **um** Stunde *hour after hour*

einen Tag **um** den anderen *one day after the other*

(c) *um* can be used adverbially with numerals in the sense of ‘about’, ‘approximately’

(see 8.1.6). It is then often followed by a definite article, but a following adjective has **strong** endings, e.g. *um die vierzig ausländische Gäste*.

(d) *um* is used to denote the degree of difference

This usually corresponds to English ‘by’:

Ich werde meinen Aufenthalt **um** zwei
Tage verlängern
Sie hat sich **um** 18 Euro verrechnet
um die Hälfte mehr
eine Erweiterung der EU **um** Rumänien

I shall extend my stay by two days
She was 18 euros out in her
calculations
half as much again
an expansion of the EU by the
inclusion of Romania

When *um* is used in this sense with a comparative adjective and a measurement phrase (see 6.5.2b), an alternative to *um* is simply to put the measurement phrase in the **accusative** case, e.g. *Sie ist (um) einen Kopf größer als ich*.

(e) *um* can convey the idea of ‘in respect of’, ‘concerning’

This sense is common when *um* is used in a prepositional object, see 16.5.10, but it occurs in other constructions, especially after some nouns and adjectives, e.g.:

der Kampf **ums** Dasein
Er tat es nur **um** das Geld
Er wandte sich an mich **um** Rat
Es ist schade **um** den Verlust
Es steht schlecht **um** ihren Bruder
ein Streit **um** etwas
Es ist recht still **um** ihn geworden

the struggle for existence
He only did it for the money
He turned to me for advice
It’s a pity about the loss
Her brother’s in a bad way
an argument about sth.
You don’t hear anything about him now

Idiomatically also *Auge um Auge, Zahn um Zahn* ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’.

(f) The prepositional adverb *darum* is used in the meaning ‘therefore’, ‘that’s why’

It is an alternative to *deshalb*:

Darum habe ich nicht schreiben können	<i>That’s why I couldn’t write</i>
Sie hatte eine Panne, darum ist sie so spät gekommen	<i>She had a breakdown, that’s why she was so late coming</i>

18.1.7 Less frequent prepositions which govern the accusative

(a) *à* is used in the sense of ‘at’ (i.e. @), with prices

zehn Paar Schuhe *à* 50 Euro Ten pairs of shoes for 50 euros

This usage is now almost obsolete, and *zu* is now used rather than *à*, see 18.2.9h.

(b) *betreffend* ‘with regard to’

betreffend is used mainly in commercial German. It is an alternative to *betrefft* (+ gen.) and may precede or follow the noun it governs:

betreffend Ihr Schreiben vom 23. Mai or: Ihr Schreiben vom 23. Mai *betreffend*

(c) *eingerechnet* ‘including’

eingerechnet is used mainly in commercial German. It follows the noun it governs:

meine Unkosten eingerechnet *including my expenses*

(d) *pro* ‘per’

pro was originally restricted to commercial language, but it has increasingly come to be used in speech. A common alternative is *je*, see 8.4.1:

Die Pfirsiche kosten 80 Cent pro Stück	<i>The peaches cost 80 cents each</i>
Was ist der Preis pro Tag?	What is the cost per day?
zwanzig Euro pro Person	twenty euros per person
Unsere Reisekosten betragen 3000 Euro	<i>Our travel expenses amount to 3000</i>
pro/je Vertreter pro/je Monat	<i>euros per representative per month</i>

As *pro* is most often used without a following adjective or determiner, the case it governs may not be obvious. This has given rise to uncertainty. In practice, when the case used is clear, *pro* is seen to be used quite frequently with the dative rather than the accusative, e.g. ***pro neuem Mitarbeiter***. Occasionally it is used with a nominative, especially with an adjective used as a noun, e.g. ***pro Angestellter***. All these alternatives are accepted as correct.

(e) *wider* ‘against’

wider is an obsolete alternative to *gegen*. It is occasionally used in elevated registers, but it occurs most often in a few set phrases:

Diese Unterlassung relativiert alle markigen	<i>This omission qualifies all the</i>
Worte wider den Terrorismus (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>vigorous speeches against terrorism</i>
wider (alles) Erwarten	against (all) expectations
wider Willen	against my (his, her, etc.) will
wider besseres Wissen	<i>against my (his, her, etc.) better</i>
	<i>judgement</i>

18.2 Prepositions governing the dative case

Nine common prepositions are used with the dative:

aus außer bei gegenüber mit nach seit von zu

The following are less frequent and are treated together in 18.2.10:

ab binnen dank entgegen entsprechend fern gemäß laut
(mit)samt nahe nebst per zufolge zuliebe zuwider

18.2.1 aus

(a) **aus** most commonly denotes direction ‘out of’ or ‘from’ a place

Er kam aus dem Haus	<i>He came out of the house</i>
Ich sah aus dem Fenster (or zum Fenster hinaus)	I looked out of the window
Er trank Wodka aus einer Tasse	He was drinking vodka from a cup
Sie ging mir aus dem Weg	She avoided me
aus der Mode kommen/sein	go/be out of fashion
aus der Übung kommen	<i>get out of practice</i>

In practice, this means that **aus** often corresponds to English ‘from’, and English learners need to distinguish between **aus** and **von**, which can also mean ‘from’ (see 18.2.8a).

aus is used with reference to places one has been **in**, with the idea of origin. Its opposite is **in** (+ acc.). **von**, by contrast, is used for ‘from’ with reference to places one has been **at**, i.e. it expresses the idea of direction. Its opposite is **zu** or **nach**. Compare:

Er kommt aus Hamburg	
Er kommt von Hamburg (i.e. on this occasion)	<i>He comes from Hamburg (i.e.</i>
aus dieser Richtung (compare: in diese(r))	<i>he lives in Hamburg)</i>

<i>Richtung</i> ‘in that direction’)	<i>He is travelling from Hamburg</i>
Dieser Schrank ist aus dem 18. Jahrhundert (i.e. it was made in the 18th century)	from that direction
ein Mädchen aus unserer Klasse (i.e. she is in our class)	This cupboard is from the 18th century
	<i>a girl from our class</i>

(b) *aus* denotes ‘made of’ referring to materials

Die Kaffeekanne war aus Silber	<i>The coffee pot was made of silver</i>
aus Holz, Stahl, Eisen	made of wood, steel, iron
ein Kleid aus Wolle	<i>a woollen dress</i>

(c) *aus* is used to denote a cause, a reason or a motive

Sie tat es aus Dankbarkeit, aus Mitleid,	<i>She did it out of gratitude, out of</i>
aus Überzeugung	<i>sympathy, from conviction</i>
Ich weiß es aus (der) Erfahrung	I know it from experience
Ich frage nur aus Interesse	I’m only asking out of interest
aus Furcht vor, Liebe zu etwas	for fear, love of sth.
aus diesem Grund(e)	<i>for that reason</i>

For the difference between *aus* and *vor* (+ dat.) to indicate cause, see 18.3.14d.

(d) Some idiomatic phrases with *aus*

aus erster Hand *at first hand*

Daraus werde ich nicht klug *I can’t make it out*

Aus dir wird nichts werden *You’ll never come to anything*

18.2.2 *außer*

(a) *außer* usually expresses a restriction (= ‘except (for)’, ‘besides’)

Niemand hat ihn gesehen außer dem Nachtwächter	<i>No-one saw him except for the nightwatchman</i>
Niemand wird es machen können außer mir	No-one will be able to do it except for me
Ich konnte nichts sehen außer Straßenlichtern	<i>I couldn't see anything besides street lights</i>

außer can also be used with the same case as the word to which it refers back, rather than with the dative. The following are acceptable alternatives to the examples above:

Niemand wird es machen können **außer** ich

Ich konnte **nichts** sehen **außer** Lichter

In effect *außer* is being used in such contexts to introduce a phrase in apposition (see 2.6) rather than as a preposition. It can be used in a similar way before another preposition, e.g. ***Außer** bei Regen kann man hier spielen.*

(b) *außer* is used in the meaning ‘out of’, ‘outside’

This sense now occurs chiefly in set phrases, in most of which *außer* is used without a following article:

Die Maschine ist außer Betrieb außer Kontrolle sein/geraten etwas außer Acht lassen Ich war außer mir	<i>The machine is out of service be/get out of control disregard sth. I was beside myself</i>
Aber dies war etwas, was ganz außer seiner Macht lag (<i>Musil</i>)	<i>But this was something which lay completely beyond his power</i>

Similarly:

außer Atem	<i>out of breath</i>	außer Gefahr	<i>out of danger</i>
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außer Reichweite
außer Übung

out of range
out of practice

außer Sicht
außer Zweifel

out of sight
beyond doubt

In one or two elevated idioms *außer* is used with an otherwise obsolete genitive, notably in *außer Landes gehen* ‘leave the country’.

With verbs of motion, *außer* can be used with the accusative, although this is only obvious in those rare contexts where a determiner or an adjective is used, e.g. *etwas außer jed en Zweifel setzen*.

18.2.3 *bei*

(a) Referring to place, *bei* usually corresponds to English ‘by’ or ‘at’

(i) In this sense *bei* is less precise than *an* (+ dat.), see 18.3.2a, meaning ‘in the vicinity of’ rather than ‘adjacent to’:

Er stand **bei** mir (= Er stand in meiner
Nähe)

Bad Homburg liegt **bei** Frankfurt
(dicht) **bei** der Kirche

Ich habe ihn neulich **beim** Fußballspiel
gesehen

He was standing by/near me

Bad Homburg is by/near Frankfurt
(right) by the church

*I saw him recently at the football
match*

Note that *bei* is always used with battles, e.g. *die Schlacht bei Hastings*.

(ii) Used with reference to people, *bei* usually means ‘at (the house of)’. It is also used to indicate place of employment:

Sie wohnt **bei** ihrer Tante

Ich habe dieses Fleisch **beim** neuen Metzger
gekauft

Sie arbeitet **bei** der Post, **bei** Bayer

She lives at her aunt's

I bought this meat at the new
butcher's

She works at the post office, at
Bayer's

bei uns
bei uns in der Fabrik

at our house
at our works

bei is not used in standard German to indicate motion **to** somebody's house. Compare: *Sie geht zu ihrer Tante* 'She's going to her aunt's house'.

(iii) *bei* is used in a number of extended senses with reference to people. This often corresponds to English 'with':

Ich habe mich **bei** ihm
entschuldigt/beschwert
Er hat großen Einfluss **beim** Minister
Mathe haben wir **bei** Frau Gerstner
Hast du deinen Ausweis **bei** dir/dabei?
Bei Goethe liest man ...

I apologized/complained to him
He has a lot of influence with the
minister
We have Frau Gerstner for maths
Have you got your identity card on
you?
In Goethe's works one reads ...

(b) *bei* can mean 'on the occasion of', 'at'

In this meaning, it is often used with nouns which do not of themselves express time to indicate the time when something took/was taking/will take place:

bei dieser Gelegenheit
bei seiner Geburt
bei dem bloßen Gedanken
Sie erblasste **bei** der Nachricht
Acht Menschen kamen **bei** diesem
Verkehrsunfall ums Leben (FAZ)
bei diesem Anblick
bei einem Glas Wein

on this occasion
at his birth
at the very thought
She turned pale at the news
Eight people were killed in this
traffic accident
at the sight of this
over a glass of wine

Similarly:

bei der Arbeit	<i>at work</i>	beim Fußball	<i>when playing football</i>
bei Tisch	at table	bei seinem Tod	at his death
bei schönem Wetter	<i>if it's fine</i>	bei diesen Worten	<i>at these words</i>

Both *bei* and *auf* (see 18.3.4b) can be used for English ‘at’, referring to formal occasions, functions and the like, e.g.:

Ich habe sie **bei** / **auf** ihrer Hochzeit kennen gelernt *I met her at their wedding*

The difference of meaning is often slight, but in general *bei* points more clearly to the time, rather than the place, of the event.

It is also used in a similar meaning in a few set phrases with nouns expressing time:

Paris **bei** Tag, London **bei** Nacht *Paris by day, London by night*

bei Tagesanbruch *at daybreak*

bei Einbruch der Nacht *at nightfall*

bei Sonnenuntergang *at sunset*

(c) *bei* often indicates attendant circumstances, meaning ‘in view of’, ‘with’

bei den immer steigenden Preisen	<i>in view of the constantly rising prices</i>
Bei diesem Gehalt kann ich mir keinen neuen Wagen leisten	With this salary I can’t afford a new car
Bei all seinen Verlusten bleibt er ein Optimist	<i>Despite all his losses he remains an optimist</i>

(d) *bei* used with the infinitive or other verbal nouns

These combinations have the sense of English ‘on ...ing’ or a subordinate time clause, see 11.4.2b and 11.6.2d. This usage is frequent in non-literary written German, but it is not restricted to that register:

beim Schließen der Türen *on shutting the doors*

beim Schlafen, **beim** Essen *while sleeping, eating*

bei seiner Ankunft *on arrival / when he arrived*

bei näherer Überlegung *on closer consideration*

(e) Idiomatic uses of *bei*

Sie war **bei** guter/schlechter Laune *She was in a good/bad mood*

Sie nannte mich **beim** Vornamen *She called me by my first name*

Sie nahm mich **beim** Wort *She took me at my word*

Sie nahm mich **bei** der Hand *She took me by the hand*

18.2.4 *gegenüber*

In writing, *gegenüber* is increasingly used with a following genitive, e.g. *gegenüber des Theaters*. However, the standard authorities are agreed that only the dative is correct.

(a) The position of *gegenüber*

(i) *gegenüber* always follows a pronoun:

Sie saß **mir gegenüber** **Ihr gegenüber** stand ein alter Herr

(ii) *gegenüber* can come **before** or **after a noun**, e.g. *gegenüber alten Menschen* or *alten Menschen gegenüber*. The position before the noun is now more frequent except in elevated registers:

seine Verantwortung **gegenüber** den
chinesischen Web-Nutzern (MM)
Gegenüber dem Rathaus liegt ein Krankenhaus

*its responsibility towards
Chinese web users
Opposite the town hall there is
a hospital*

(b) Referring to place, *gegenüber* means ‘opposite’

Ich setzte mich ihr **gegenüber** *I sat down opposite her*

Ich wohne **gegenüber** dem Krankenhaus *I live opposite the hospital*

In this sense, *gegenüber* is often used with a following *von*, especially in speech: *Sie saß gegenüber von mir/Ich wohne gegenüber vom Krankenhaus*. Using *von* with a pronoun is considered poor style in writing.

gegenüber is often used on its own, as an adverb, e.g. *Sie wohnt gegenüber / das Haus gegenüber/die Leute von gegenüber*.

(c) *gegenüber* can express a comparison (= ‘compared to’)

Depending on the context, *gegen*, see 18.1.4c, or *neben*, see 18.3.9d, may be alternatives to *gegenüber* in this sense:

Gegenüber meiner Schwester bin ich groß *I’m tall compared to my sister*

gegenüber dem Vorjahr *compared to last year*

(d) *gegenüber* can mean ‘in relation to’, ‘in respect of’, ‘towards’

mein Verhalten Astrid gegenüber	<i>my attitude towards Astrid</i>
Heinrich war vollkommen hilflos Maries	<i>Heinrich was completely helpless in</i>
Ängsten gegenüber (Böll)	<i>the face of Marie’s fears</i>

In this sense, *gegenüber* is particularly frequent after nouns and adjectives, where it is an (often more common) alternative to *gegen*, see 18.1.4f, or, in some contexts, *zu*, see 18.2.9g:

Er handelte durchaus gerecht mir gegenüber (or gegen mich)	<i>He acted absolutely fairly towards me</i>
Seine Güte mir gegenüber (or zu mir) war rührend	<i>His kindness towards me was touching</i>

Similarly:

das Misstrauen gegenüber/gegen *distrust of*
eine Pflicht gegenüber/gegen *a duty towards*
gleichgültig gegenüber/gegen *indifferent towards*
rücksichtsvoll/-los gegenüber/gegen *(in)considerate to*
freundlich gegenüber/zu *kind to(wards)*

18.2.5 *mit*

(a) ***mit*** corresponds most often to English ‘with’

ein Paar Würstchen **mit** Kartoffelsalat *a pair of sausages with potato salad*
Mit ihr spiele ich oft Tennis *I often play tennis with her*
Was ist **mit** dir los? *What’s up with you?*
mit großer Freude *with great pleasure*
mit meinem Bruder zusammen *together with my brother*

(b) ***mit*** indicates the instrument with which an action is performed

This usually corresponds to English ‘with’. Note that ***mit*** indicates the **instrument**, whilst ***durch*** indicates the **means** by which an action is carried out, see 18.1.2c:

Er hat **mit** einem Bleistift geschrieben *He wrote with a pencil*
Er hat den Frosch **mit** einem Messer getötet *He killed the frog with a knife*

German usage sometimes differs from English:

mit Tinte schreiben *write in ink*
mit leiser Stimme *in a low voice*

To refer to a means of transport German uses **mit** for English ‘by’:

mit der Bahn/dem Zug	<i>by rail/train</i>	mit dem Auto	<i>by car</i>
mit dem Flugzeug	<i>by plane</i>	mit der Post	<i>by post</i>
Ich bin mit dem Fahrrad gekommen		<i>I came by bike/on a bike</i>	

(c) **mit** is commonly used in phrases involving parts of the body

English does not have a preposition in contexts like this, or uses a simple verb:

Sie hat mich **mit** dem Fuß gestoßen *She kicked me*

mit den Achseln zucken *shrug one's shoulders*

(d) Idiomatic uses of **mit**

mit vierzig Jahren *at the age of forty*

mit der Zeit *in (the course of) time*

etwas mit Absicht tun *do sth. on purpose*

mit anderen Worten (m.a.W.) *in other words*

Her damit! (*coll.*) *Give it here!*

Schluss damit! *That's enough!*

mit oder ohne Kinder *with or without children* (see 18.1.5)

18.2.6 **nach**

(a) **nach** denotes direction, in the sense of English ‘to’

See 18.5 for a summary of the German equivalents for English ‘to’. In this sense **nach** is only used with:

(i) **neuter names of countries and towns** used without an article:

Er geht **nach** Amerika, **nach** Irland, **nach** Bacharach

in is used with names of countries used with an article, see 4.4.1: *Sie geht in die Schweiz.*

(ii) points of the compass used without an article:

Wir fahren **nach** Norden, Süden, Westen, Osten

in is used when there is an article, which is usually the case if there is an adjective with the noun: *Wir fahren in den sonnigen Süden.*

(iii) **adverbs of place:**

Sie geht **nach** oben, **nach** unten, **nach** vorne, **nach** hinten, **nach** rechts, **nach** links

Also in the phrase *nach Hause gehen* ‘go home’.

In North Germany *nach* is often used for *zu*, *an*, *auf* or *in*: *Ich gehe nach* (standard German: *zu*) *meiner Schwester*; *Wir gingen nach dem* (standard German: *auf den*, *zum*) *Bahnhof*. This is a non-standard regionalism, but North Germans sometimes use it in writing.

(b) *nach* can be used in the sense of ‘towards’, ‘in the direction of’

It can be strengthened by adding *hin*, see 7.2.3, e.g.:

Er bewegte sich langsam **nach** der Tür *He moved slowly towards the door*

Ich sah **nach** der Tür (hin) *I looked towards the door*

nach allen Seiten (hin) *in all directions*

auf... zu is a frequent alternative in the meaning ‘towards’, see 18.3.5b.

(c) Referring to time, *nach* means ‘after’ or ‘later’

Nach vielen Jahren ließen sie sich scheiden	<i>After many years they got divorced</i>
Einen Monat nach seiner Verhaftung wurde er freigelassen	<i>A month after his arrest he was released</i>
Nach Ostern studiert sie in Erlangen Chemie	<i>After Easter she’s going to study chemistry in Erlangen</i>
bald nach Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts nach einer Weile	<i>soon after the beginning of the 17th century after a while</i>
nach Wochen, Jahren	<i>weeks, years later</i>

The prepositional adverb *danach* can be used to mean ‘after(wards)’ or ‘later’.

(d) *nach* can be used in the sense of ‘according to’, ‘judging by’

Nach meiner Uhr ist es schon halb elf *By my watch it’s already half past ten*

nach italienischer Art *in the Italian manner*

nach Ansicht meines Bruders *in my brother’s view*

etwas nach dem Gewicht verkaufen *sell sth. by weight*

nach besten Kräften *to the best of one’s ability*

nach Wunsch *just as I (he, she, etc.) wanted*

In this sense, *nach* can **follow** the noun. In general, this is usual only with certain nouns (some of which it may precede **or** follow) in set phrases:

allem Anschein nach	
diesem Bericht nach (in less formal registers usually: <i>nach diesem Bericht</i>)	<i>to all appearances</i>
der Größe nach (also commonly: <i>nach der Größe</i>)	<i>according to this report</i>
meiner Meinung nach (also: <i>nach meiner Meinung</i>)	<i>according to size</i> <i>in my opinion</i>
Ich kenne sie nur dem Namen nach	<i>I only know her by name</i> <i>in turns</i>

der Reihe **nach**
Seiner Aussprache **nach** kommt Herr
Oettinger aus Schwaben

*Judging by his accent Herr
Oettinger comes from Swabia*

In formal registers there are a few other prepositions which are used to mean 'according to', i.e. *entsprechend*, *gemäß*, *laut* and *zufolge*, see 18.2.10e.

18.2.7 *seit*

seit marks a period of time beginning in the past and continuing to the present or a more recent point in the past. It corresponds to English 'since' or 'for':

Er ist **seit** drei Wochen hier
Ich wartete **seit** einer halben Stunde
auf dem Marktplatz
Seit wann bist du wieder zu Hause?
Seit seiner Krankheit habe ich ihn
nicht mehr gesehen
Erst **seit** kurzem gibt es Sondertarife
nach Ägypten

He's been here for three weeks
I had been waiting in the market-place
for half an hour
Since when have you been back home?
I haven't seen him again since his illness
*There have only been special fares to
Egypt for a short while*

For the use of tenses with *seit* 'for', see 12.1.2 and 12.2.4a.

An accusative phrase with *schon* is a possible alternative to *seit* 'for', e.g. *Er ist schon drei Wochen hier*, see 9.1.29.

18.2.8 *von*

(a) ***von*** indicates direction 'from' a place

(i) In this sense, ***von*** is the opposite of ***zu***, which indicates direction towards, see 18.2.9:

Ich fuhr **von** Frankfurt nach München
 Sie bekam einen Brief **von** mir
 Sie kommt **von** ihrer Schwester
 Ich wohne zehn Minuten **vom** Bahnhof
 (entfernt)
 Die Blätter fallen **von** den Bäumen

I went from Frankfurt to Munich
She received a letter from me
She's coming from her sister's
I live ten minutes from the
station
The leaves are falling from the
trees

For the difference between *von* and *aus* as equivalents of English 'from', see 18.2.1a.

(ii) *von* can be strengthened by adding **aus** after the noun to **emphasize the point of origin**:

Von meinem Fenster (**aus**) kann ich die
 Paulskirche sehen
 Er ist **von** Bern (**aus**) mit dem Nachtzug
 nach Lissabon gefahren

I can see St. Paul's church from my
window
He travelled by the night train
from Bern to Lisbon

von ... aus also occurs in a few idiomatic phrases:

Er war **von** Haus **aus** Lehrer
von mir **aus**
von Natur **aus**

He was originally a teacher
as far as I'm concerned
by nature

(iii) **Direction from a point** can be emphasized by adding *her* (see 7.2.5):

Eine Stimme kam **von** oben **her** *A voice came from above*

Ich komme **von** meiner Schwester **her** *I am coming from my sister's*

von ... her is now commonly (and fashionably) used in the sense 'in respect of', 'from the point of view of', 'regarding'. This is in effect a contraction of the phrase *von ... her betrachte t*:

Von Beruf **her** ist er Schlosser

As for his job, he's a mechanic
 Particularly subtle in respect of the

Besonders raffiniert von der Farbe her	colouring
Von der Zielsetzung her sind wir der gleichen Meinung	<i>We're of the same opinion in respect of our objectives</i>

Occasionally, *her* is omitted in these contexts: *Von der Zielsetzung sind wir der gleichen Meinung.*

(b) *von* means 'from' referring to time

von indicates a starting-point in time. It corresponds to English 'from' and is often strengthened by a following *an*:

Von 1991 (an) hat sie in Rostock gelebt	<i>From 1991 she lived in Rostock</i>
Von kommendem Montag an kostet das Benzin 10 Cent mehr pro Liter	From next Monday petrol will cost 10 cents a litre more
von Anfang an	(right) from the start
von neun Uhr an	from nine o'clock (on)
von nun an	from now on
von der Zeit an	from then on
von Anfang bis Ende	from beginning to end
von heute auf morgen	from one day to the next, overnight
von vornherein	from the outset, from the first
von jeher/ von alters her	from time immemorial, always
von Jugend auf	from his (my, etc.) youth
von Zeit zu Zeit	<i>from time to time</i>

(c) *von* marks the agent in passive constructions

Details about the use of *von* with the passive, and the difference between *von* and *durch* as equivalents of English 'by' are given in section 13.3a.

von is also used in this sense, corresponding to English 'by', to mark authorship and the like, e.g. *ein Roman von Daniel Kehlmann, eine Oper von Wagner, ein*

Gemälde von Caspar David Friedrich.

(d) A phrase with *von* is often used in place of a genitive

i.e. for English ‘of’, e.g. *ein Ereignis von weltgeschichtlicher Bedeutung*. This usage is explained in 2.4.

(e) *von* has a wide range of figurative uses

(i) It often corresponds to English ‘of’ in the sense of ‘on the part of’:

Das war sehr nett, liebenswürdig, vernünftig	<i>That was very nice, kind, sensible</i>
von ihr	<i>of her</i>
Das war doch dumm von mir	That was silly of me, wasn't it?
Er tat es von selbst	<i>He did it of his own accord</i>

(ii) Some common idiomatic phrases with *von*:

Das ist nicht von ungefähr passiert *It didn't happen by accident*
Das kommt davon *That's what comes of it*
Das gilt nicht von ihm *That's not true of him*
Ich kenne sie nur vom Sehen *I only know her by sight*
von ganzem Herzen *with all my heart*
Das versteht sich von selbst *That is self-explanatory*

18.2.9 zu

(a) *zu* expresses direction

It is a common equivalent for English ‘to’, particularly:

(i) going to a person('s house):

Er geht **zu** seinem Onkel, **zu** Müllers, **zum** Frisör

For 'at'(a person's house), **bei** is used, see 18.2.3.

(ii) going to a place or an occasion:

Dieser Bus fährt zum Bahnhof	<i>This bus goes to the station</i>
Ich ging zur Kirche und wartete dort auf sie	I went to the church and waited for her there
Wir machten einen Ausflug zum Dorf	We went on an outing to the village
Sie kehrte zu ihrer Arbeit zurück	She returned to her work
eine Expedition zum Mond	an expedition to the moon
Sie geht morgen zu einem Kongress	<i>She's going to a conference tomorrow</i>

zu is the opposite of **von**, see 18.2.8a, and puts the emphasis on the **general direction** rather than reaching the destination. For the distinction between *zu* and the more specific prepositions *an*, *auf* or *in* (with the accusative) as an equivalent of English 'to', see 18.5.

zu can be strengthened by adding *hin* after the noun, see 7.2.3, e.g. *Sie ging zur Post (hin)* . *Er blickte zur Decke (hin)*. The effect is to emphasize the direction, so that **zu ... hin** is a common equivalent for English 'towards'.

(iii) in some idiomatic phrases:

Sie sah **zum** Fenster/ **zur** Tür **hinaus** *She looked out of the window/the door*
Setzen Sie sich doch **zu** uns! *Do come and join us*

(b) **zu** sometimes refers to a place

i.e. with the meaning of English 'at' or 'in'. This sense of *zu* used to be common, especially with names of towns, but it is now obsolete except in elevated registers, as modern German prefers *in*:

J.S. Bach wurde **zu** (*more usually*: in) Eisenach
geboren
der Dom **zu** Köln (*more usually*: der Kölner Dom)

*J.S. Bach was born in
Eisenach
Cologne cathedral*

However, *zu* is still used in this sense in some common set phrases, e.g.:

zu Hause *at home*

zu beiden Seiten *on either side*

(c) ***zu*** is used in certain time expressions

(i) with the major festivals:

zu Weihnachten zu Pfingsten zu Ostern zu Neujahr

(ii) with ***Zeit*** and ***Stunde***

With *Zeit* and *Stunde*, both *zu* and *in* are used, in different contexts.

zu is used in contexts denoting **one or more specific points or limited periods of time**:

zur Zeit der letzten Wahlen	<i>at the time of the last election</i>
zu der Zeit, zu dieser Zeit	at that time
zu der Zeit, als du hier warst	at the time when you were here
zu einer anderen Zeit	at some other time
zu jeder Zeit	at all times, at any time
zu jeder Tageszeit	at any time of the day
zu gewissen Zeiten	at certain times
zur gewohnten Zeit	at the usual time
gerade noch zur rechten Zeit	in the nick of time
zu gleicher Zeit	at the same time, simultaneously
Zu meiner Zeit war das alles anders	In my time that was all different
zu dieser Stunde	at this hour
zu jeder Stunde	at any time
zur selben Stunde	

at the same hour

also: **zu** *diesem Zeitpunkt* ‘at this point in time’.

in is used to denote a **period within or after which something occurs**, or in phrases which are felt to denote **duration** rather than a point or limited period in time:

	<i>In all that time we didn't see her</i>
In all der Zeit (<i>or</i> In der ganzen Zeit) haben wir sie nicht gesehen	In a short time he was back again
In kurzer Zeit war er wieder da	In our times that is no longer done
In unserer Zeit tut man das nicht mehr	at a time when towns are growing
in einer Zeit, in der die Städte wachsen	at a time like the present
in einer solchen Zeit wie heute	in earlier times
in früheren Zeiten	in times to come
in künftigen Zeiten	at first
in der ersten Zeit	in peaceful hours
in ruhigen Stunden	<i>at the eleventh hour</i>
in elfter Stunde	

(iii) with **Mal**, e.g. **zum** *ersten Mal*, **zum** *zehnten Mal*, etc. (see 8.4.3)

(d) **zu** can express purpose

(i) In these contexts **zu** is the equivalent of English ‘for’:

zu diesem Zweck	<i>for this purpose</i>
Das ist kein Anlass zur Klage	That is no cause for complaint
Was gibt es heute zum Nachschick?	What's for dessert today?
Stoff zu einem neuen Anzug	material for a new suit
Zum Geburtstag hat er mir eine Uhr geschenkt	He bought me a watch for my birthday
Wir hatten keine Gelegenheit zu einem Gespräch	<i>We didn't have a chance for a talk</i>

The prepositional adverb **dazu** can be used to mean ‘for that purpose’, e.g. *Dazu soll man ein scharfes Messer gebrauchen*. Compare also *Wozu?* ‘To what purpose?’, ‘What for?’

(ii) In this sense, *zu* is very common with an infinitive used as a noun, or with other verbal nouns, where English uses ‘for ...ing’ or an infinitive with ‘to’, see **11.4.2d** and **11.6.2b**. It is typical of written non-literary German, but it is by no means confined to that register.

Wozu gebraucht man dieses Messer? Zum Kartoffelschälen.	<i>What do you use this knife for? For peeling potatoes/To peel potatoes</i>
Hier gibt es viele Möglichkeiten zum Schilaufen	There are lots of possibilities for skiing here
Ich sage dir das zu deiner Beruhigung	<i>I’m telling you this to reassure you</i>

(iii) In certain contexts, this sense of *zu* approaches that of *als*, i.e. ‘by way of’, as:

Er murmelte etwas zur Antwort	<i>He muttered something by way of reply</i>
Er tat es mir zu Gefallen	<i>He did it as a favour to me</i>

Similarly:

zur Abwechslung	<i>for a change</i>	zum Scherz	<i>as a joke</i>
zum Andenken an	<i>in memory of</i>	zum Spaß	<i>as a joke</i>
zum Beispiel	<i>for example</i>	zur Strafe	<i>as a punishment</i>
zur Not	<i>if necessary, at a pinch</i>	zum Vergnügen	<i>for pleasure</i>

(e) In some contexts **zu** indicates a result or an effect

The English equivalent is most often ‘to’:

Zu meinem Erstaunen hat sie die Prüfung bestanden	<i>To my surprise she passed the exam</i>
---	---

Similarly:

zu meiner Befriedigung *to my satisfaction*

zu meiner großen Freude *to my great pleasure*

Es ist zum Lachen, zum Heulen, *It is laughable, enough to make one*

zum Verrücktwerden *weep, enough to drive one mad*

zu is very frequent in this sense in the prepositional object of verbs, see 16.5.13.

(f) *zu* can express a change of state

This usage occurs in conjunction with a small number of verbs or nouns:

Sie wählten ihn **zum** Präsidenten *They elected him President*

Er wurde **zum** Major befördert *He was promoted to major*

Ich habe es mir **zur** Regel gemacht, *I've made it a rule to do this*

dies zu tun

Similarly with: *bestimmen* 'destine to be', *degradieren* 'demote', *ernennen* 'appoint', *krönen* 'crown', *weißen* 'ordain', *werden* 'become' (see 16.6.1), etc. and the nouns *die Beförderung* 'promotion', *die Ernennung* 'appointment', *die Wahl* 'election', etc.

(g) *zu* can express a mental attitude towards someone or something

(i) This is frequent with adjectives, see 6.4.1, e.g.:

Sie war sehr freundlich **zu** mir *She was very kind to me*

Similarly:

frech zu

impudent towards

nett zu

nice to

gut zu (un)höflich zu	good, kind to (im)polite to	respektvoll zu unfreundlich zu	respectful to <i>unkind to</i>
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(ii) also with **some nouns**, e.g.:

Er hatte keine freundschaftlichen *He was not on friendly terms with these people*

Beziehungen **zu** diesen Menschen

ihre Einstellung **zur** Wiedervereinigung *her attitude to reunification*

seine Liebe **zu** ihr *his love for her*

das Verhältnis des Einzelnen **zum** Staat *the relationship of the individual to the state*

gegen (see 18.1.4f) and **gegenüber** (see 18.2.4d) can also denote attitude towards or relations with someone or something. Whether *gegen* or *zu* is used depends on the particular noun or adjective, though *gegen* tends to occur with those which denote hostile attitudes, *zu* with those which denote friendly attitudes. A few adjectives can be used with either, e.g.:

gerecht zu/gegen grausam zu/gegen	<i>fair, just to cruel to</i>	hart zu/gegen	<i>hard towards</i>
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gegen is used with some nouns although the related adjective has *zu*, e.g. *die Frechheit, die Gerechtigkeit, die Grausamkeit, die Härte, die (Un)höflichkeit gegen jdn.* **gegenüber** is a common alternative to *gegen* or *zu* with most adjectives or nouns which occur with these prepositions.

(h) Uses of **zu** with numbers

(i) to indicate price or measure:

10 Stück Seife **zu** je 4 Euro *10 bars of soap at 4 euros each*

5 Päckchen Kaffee **zu** hundert Gramm *5 hundred gram packs of coffee*
zum halben Preis *at half price*

Also with fractions, etc. *zur Hälfte, zum Teil, zu einem Drittel fertig*

(ii) With the dative of the cardinal or the stem of the ordinal to indicate groups, e.g. *zu zweien, zu zweit*, see **8.1.3b**.

(iii) With the declined ordinal number for ‘first(ly)’, ‘secondly’, etc., e.g. *zum Ersten, zum Zweiten*, etc., see **8.2e**.

(i) Idiomatic uses of *zu*

jdn. zum Besten haben *make a fool of sb.*

zu Boden fallen *fall to the ground*

sich (*dat.*) etwas zu eigen machen *adopt sth.*

zu Ende gehen *draw to a close*

zu Fuß *on foot*

jdn. zu Rate ziehen *ask sb.’s advice*

jdn. zur Rechenschaft ziehen *call sb. to account*

zur Sache kommen *come to the point*

jdm. zur Seite stehen *give sb. one’s support*

zur Welt kommen *be born*

18.2.10 Less frequent prepositions governing the dative

Several less frequently used prepositions are followed by the dative case. Most of them are characteristic of formal written registers.

(a) *ab* ‘from’

ab was originally restricted to commercial and official German, but has become common in all registers. The case use with *ab* varies. When referring to place, it is always used with the dative, but when referring to time, the accusative is used as frequently as the dative if no article follows.

(i) Referring to **place**, it is an alternative to *von*, but it emphasizes the starting point more strongly:

Ab Jericho folgten wir einer langen Kolonne israelischer Touristenbusse (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>From Jericho we followed a long convoy of Israeli tourist buses</i>
Dieser Sondertarif gilt ab allen deutschen Flughäfen ab Fabrik	This special fare applies from all airports in Germany <i>ex works</i>

(ii) Referring to **time**, *ab* is used in the meaning ‘from’ and is an alternative to *von ... a n*. If it is used without a following determiner (as is usually the case, see 4.10), both the dative and the accusative are found and considered equally correct:

ab neun Uhr, ab heute ab sofort ab ersten/erstem Mai ab kommende(r) Woche ab nächsten/nächstem Monat	<i>from nine o'clock, from today with immediate effect from the first of May from next week from next month</i>
--	---

If there is a definite article, then the dative must be used:

ab dem ersten Mai ab dem 21. Lebensjahr	<i>from the first of May from the age of 21</i>
--	---

(b) *innen* indicates a period of time (= ‘within’)

It is used, especially in writing, to avoid the potential ambiguity of *in*, see 18.3.7b:

innen einem Jahr, drei Jahren *within a year, three years*

innen kurzem *shortly*

In formal registers *innen* is occasionally used with a following genitive, e.g. *innen eines Jahres*.

In Switzerland *innert* is often used for *innen*, with a following dative or (occasionally) a genitive, e.g. *innert einem/eines Jahres*.

(c) **dank** ‘thanks to’

dank now occurs as frequently with a following genitive in writing, especially in the plural and with verbal nouns:

dank seinem Einfluss/seines Einflusses *thanks to his influence*

dank des schnellen Einsatzes der *thanks to rapid action by the fire brigade*

Feuerwehr (BrZ)

dank seiner Sprachkenntnisse *thanks to his knowledge of languages*

(d) **entgegen** ‘contrary to’

It can occur before or (rather less frequently) after the noun:

entgegen allen Erwartungen/ *contrary to all expectations*

allen Erwartungen **entgegen**

In writing, *entgegen* is quite widely found with a genitive, e.g. *entgegen des allgemeinen Trends* (BrZ), although this usage is considered incorrect.

(e) **entsprechend, gemäß, laut, zufolge** ‘according to’

These prepositions are typical of formal registers. They all mean ‘according to’, as does the more frequent *nach*, see 18.2.6d, but they are not interchangeable in all contexts. It is not uncommon for *entsprechend* and *gemäß* to be used with a

genitive, although this usage is not (yet) regarded as correct.

(i) **entsprechend** means ‘in accordance with’. It can precede or (more commonly) follow the noun:

dem neuen Trend **entsprechend** / *in accordance with the recent trend*

entsprechend dem neuen Trend

(ii) **gemäß** usually follows the noun, but occasionally precedes it. It means ‘in accordance with’:

Die Maschine wurde den Anweisungen *The machine was put into operation*

gemäß in Betrieb gesetzt *in accordance with the instructions*

(iii) **laut** introduces a verbatim report of something said or written. It is normally used without a following article, see 4.10:

Laut Berichten soll der Präsident neue *According to reports the president has proposed*

Verhandlungen vorgeschlagen haben *fresh negotiations*

laut Gesetz *according to the law*

laut Wladimir Putin *according to Vladimir Putin*

If the following noun is used with an article (or an adjective), it is often in the genitive rather than the dative:

laut des Berichtes/dem Bericht aus Berlin *according to the report from Berlin*

laut neuer Berichte/neuen Berichten *according to recent reports*

laut ämtlichem Nachweis/ämtlichen *according to an official attestation*

Nachweises

(iv) **zufolge** follows the noun. In accepted usage it indicates a consequence:

Dem Vertrag zufolge werden nun große Mengen von Rohöl geliefert	<i>In accordance with/following the contract large quantities of crude oil are now being delivered</i>
--	--

zufolge is now widely used where there is no sense of a consequence or a result, although not all authorities consider this acceptable:

unbestätigten Berichten zufolge	<i>according to unconfirmed reports</i>
einem Regierungssprecher zufolge	<i>according to a government spokesman</i>

The use of *zufolge* with a following noun in the genitive, e.g. *zufolge des Vertrages*, is now obsolete and *infolge* (+ gen.) is used instead.

(f) **fern** ‘far from’

fern can occur before or (rather less frequently) after the noun:

Sie blieben fern der Heimat/der Heimat fern	<i>They remained far from home</i>
Europa liegt immer noch fern dem britischen Horizont (<i>Zeit</i>)	<i>Europe is still far removed from British horizons</i>

In practice the most usual equivalent of English ‘far from’ are *fern von* or *weit von*.

(g) **mitsamt** and **samt** ‘together with’

These are sometimes used with a following genitive. The usual equivalent for ‘together with’ is *zusammen mit*, or often simply *mit*:

Der Beamte verschwand mitsamt den Dokumenten (<i>FR</i>)	<i>The policeman disappeared together with the documents</i>
Neben Marihuana entdeckten die Beamten	<i>Apart from marihuana the policemen discovered a</i>

im Wagen eine Pumpgun **samt** *pump-action shotgun in the car together with*
scharfer Munition (*Lux*) *live ammunition*

(h) *nahe* ‘near (to)’

is used mainly in formal registers:

ein altes Haus **nahe** dem freien Feld (*FR*) *an old house near the open field*

When used in an abstract sense *nahe* commonly follows the noun:

Sie war der Verzweiflung **nahe** *She was close to despair*

(i) *nebst* ‘together with’, ‘in addition to’

nebst is used exclusively in formal registers. It occasionally appears with the genitive, but this is considered incorrect:

eine sehr gute Bibliographie nebst einem hilfreichen Lexikon der philosophischen Schlüsselbegriffe (<i>SZ</i>)	<i>a very good bibliography in addition to a useful glossary of the key philosophical concepts</i>
---	--

(j) *per* ‘per’, ‘by’

per was originally only used in commercial language, but it is used increasingly in spoken and other less formal registers. When used with a means of transport it is an alternative to more usual *mit*, see 18.2.5b:

per Post (= mit der Post) *by post*

per Bahn (= mit der Bahn) *by rail*

per Luftfracht *by air*

per Einschreiben *by recorded mail*

per Adresse (p.A.) *c/o*

per Anhalter fahren *to hitchhike*

mit jdm. per du sein *be on first name terms with sb. (i.e. use 'du' to them)*

Sie bezahlen erst per 31. Dezember *You do not pay until 31 December*

Die Waren sind per 1. Mai bestellt *The goods are ordered for 1 May*

As *per* is most often used without a following adjective or determiner, the case it governs is often not obvious. This has given rise to uncertainty, and in practice, when a case is clear, *per* is actually seen to be used with the accusative as well as the dative, e.g. *per zweiten/zweitem Bildungsweg*. Either usage is regarded as correct.

(k) *zuliebe* 'for the sake of' follows the noun it governs

Ich habe es meiner Mutter *zuliebe* getan *I did it for my mother's sake*

Dir *zuliebe* gibt es Spargel *Just for you, we're having asparagus*

wahrscheinlich dem Wald *zuliebe* (Walser) *probably for the sake of the forest*

(l) *zuwider* 'contrary to' follows the noun it governs

It is an emphatic alternative to *gegen* in formal registers:

Karl handelte seinem Befehl *zuwider* *Karl acted contrary to his order*

18.3 Prepositions governing the accusative or the dative case

Nine prepositions govern the accusative *or* the dative:

an	hinter	neben	unter	zwischen
auf	in	über	vor	

General rules governing the use of the accusative and the dative with these prepositions are given in 18.3.1, and the individual prepositions are dealt with in the following sections.

For the more common ones (i.e. *an*, *auf*, *in*, *über*, *unter* and *vor*) the use with the accusative and the dative is treated separately.

18.3.1 The use of the accusative and the dative

These nine prepositions govern the **accusative case** if they indicate **direction**, but the **dative** if they indicate **position**.

It is often claimed that the accusative case is used with these prepositions when motion is involved, but it is more precise to say that the accusative case is used with a phrase expressing the direction in which someone or something is moving or being put, whilst the dative normally indicates that someone or something is stationary.

Ich hänge das Bild an **die** Wand *I'm hanging the picture on the wall*

Das Bild hängt an **der** Wand *The picture is hanging on the wall*

Wir gingen in **dieses** Zimmer hinein *We went into this room*

Wir essen in **diesem** Zimmer *We eat in this room*

In some contexts the reason for the choice of case is less obvious, or usage is variable.

(a) The dative case is sometimes used when a direction is involved

However, in these contexts there is **no movement in relation to the person or thing** denoted by the following noun:

Er ging neben **seinem** Freund *He was walking next to his friend*

(He and his friend are moving with equal speed in the same direction)

Er ging zwischen **seinen** Eltern *He was walking between his parents*

(His position is constant in relation to his parents)

Ein Flugzeug kreiste über **der** Stadt *A plane was circling over the town*

(Though it was moving, it stayed over the town)

Usage where two prepositional phrases occur in the same sentence with a verb of motion follows the basic principle, e.g. *Elke legte sich auf **eine** Bank **im** Schatten hin*. Elke is moving in the direction of the bench, but the bench is stationary in relation to the shadow.

(b) The dative is used with verbs of arriving, appearing and disappearing

Sie kamen **am** Bahnhof an *They arrived at the station*

Sie landeten auf **dem** Mond *They landed on the moon*

Er kroch unter **dem** Tisch hervor *He crept out from under the table*

Sie erschien hinter **der** Theke *She appeared behind the counter*

Sie verbarg sich unter **der** Decke *She hid under the sheet*

Der Reiter verschwand hinter **dem** Berg *The horseman disappeared behind the hill*

German does not consider that such verbs indicate a direction, so that, in the last example, the hill is perceived as the place **where** the horseman disappeared. However, there can be times when the speaker perceives there to be movement in a particular direction with these verbs and uses the accusative, e.g. *Er verschwand plötzlich über **das** Dach*. Nevertheless, such contexts are rare.

(c) Different usage with some simple and prefixed verbs

In a few cases, these prepositions are used with the **accusative** after a **simple verb**, but with the **dative** after a related **prefixed verb**. With the prefixed verbs, the action is seen as already completed, whereas with the simple verbs it is

visualized as ongoing:

(an / fest) **binden** *tie, fasten*

Das Pferd war an **einen** Baum gebunden

Das Pferd war an **einem** Baum an-/festgebunden

(vor) **fahren** *drive (up)*

Der Wagen fuhr vor **den** Bahnhof

Der Wagen fuhr vor **dem** Schloss vor

(auf) **hängen** *hang (up)*

Sie hängte das Bild an **die** Wand

Sie hängte das Bild an **der** Wand auf

sich (fest) klammern *cling to*

Er klammerte sich an **sie**

Er klammerte sich an **ihr** fest

sich (nieder) legen, - setzen *lie, sit down*

Sie legte/setzte sich auf **die** Bank

Sie legte/setzte sich auf **der** Bank nieder

(auf) **schreiben** *write (down)*

Ich schrieb ihre Adresse in **mein** Notizbuch

Ich schrieb ihre Adresse in **meinem** Notizbuch auf

(d) Verbs with the prefix *ein-*

(i) Many verbs with the prefix *ein-* are often followed by a **phrase with *in* , in the accusative case:**

Sie stieg in **den** Zug ein Wir weihten ihn in **das** Geheimnis ein

Ich trug den Namen in **die** Liste ein Er wickelte sich in **eine** Decke ein

(ii) A noun phrase in the accusative case is used even in the **sein** -passive, although here usage is variable:

Er war in **eine** Reisedecke eingehüllt Sie ist in **das** Geheimnis eingeweiht

Sein Name war in **die** / **der** Liste eingetragen

(iii) **sich einschließen** is used with either case depending on whether the movement in a particular direction is emphasized: *Sie schloss sich in ihr / ihrem Zimmer ein.*

(iv) **sich einfinden**, **einkehren** and **eintreffen** are followed by a preposition with a noun phrase in the dative case, as they denote arrival (see (a) above):

Wir trafen in **der** Hauptstadt ein *We arrived in the capital*

Sie kehrten in **einer** Gaststätte ein *They turned in at an inn*

(e) With a few verbs usage is idiomatic

In the main these are verbs which do not denote movement as such. The choice of case depends on how native speakers envisage the action, and it can vary. If no preposition is indicated in the examples below, the verb is commonly used with more than one (e.g. *sehen*, which occurs with *an*, *auf*, *in*, etc.).

(i) A noun phrase in the **dative** case is usual in conjunction with the following verbs:

anbringen <i>fix</i>	befestigen an <i>fasten</i>	drucken <i>print</i>	notieren <i>note</i>
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(ii) A noun phrase in the **accusative** case is usual in conjunction with the following verbs:

anbauen an	<i>build on to</i>	kleiden in	<i>clothe in</i>	verteilen	<i>distribute</i>
anschließen	<i>add on</i>	münden in	<i>flow into</i>	vertieft in	<i>engrossed in</i>
gebeugt über	<i>bent over</i>	sehen, schauen	<i>look</i>	verwickelt in	<i>involved in</i>
grenzen an	<i>border on</i>	stützen auf	<i>support</i>		

(f) A few verbs have different meanings when used with the dative and the accusative

aufnehmen A noun phrase in the accusative case implies complete acceptance; in the dative case it implies that the acceptance is temporary:

Er ist **in den** Chor aufgenommen worden *He was admitted into the choir*

Ich wurde **in seiner** Familie sehr *I was very amicably received into his family*

freundlich aufgenommen

einführen If there is an idea of direction, a noun phrase in the accusative case is used, whereas a noun phrase in the dative puts the stress on the place:

Waren **in ein** Land einführen *to import goods into a country*

(e.g. **nach** Italien)

Er will die Sitte in diesem Land einführen *He wants to introduce the custom into that country*

(i.e. **in** Italien)

halten If the gesture is emphasized, a noun phrase in the accusative is used, whilst a noun phrase in the dative emphasizes the position:

Er hielt das Buch in **die** Höhe *He held the book up in the air*

Er hielt das Buch in der Hand *He held the book in his hand*

klopfen A noun phrase in the accusative is the norm, but in the context of knocking on doors, etc., the dative can be used if the emphasis is on the place rather than the action:

Er klopfte **an die** Tür/ **auf den** Tisch *He knocked on the door/the table*

Da klopfte es **an der** Haustür *There was a knock at the front door*

(i.e. the front door rather than somewhere else)

schreiben A noun phrase in the accusative case refers to the action of writing down, but the dative case is used if the place where something is written is uppermost:

Er schrieb es **in sein** Heft *He wrote it (down) in his notebook*

In seinem Brief schreibt er, dass ... *He writes in his letter that ...*

(g) Idiomatic use

If these prepositions **do not have their literal meaning** they are used only or predominantly with a **single case**.

In idiomatic uses, ***auf*** and ***über*** are used only with the **accusative**, all the other **prepositions** mainly with the **dative**.

This is particularly evident where these prepositions are used to refer to **time**, where they are used in **prepositional objects**, see 16.5, with **adjectives**, see 6.4, and in all other contexts where they are not used in their literal senses.

18.3.2 *an* (+ dative)

(a) The basic meaning of *an* with the dative is ‘on (the side of)’

(i) This contrasts with *auf* (+ dat.), which means ‘on (top of)’. *an* (+ dat.) can correspond to English ‘on’, or, if the person or thing is not actually touching, ‘at’, ‘by’ or ‘along’. See 18.2.3a for the distinction between *an* (+ dat.) and *bei* in the sense of ‘at’:

Das Bild hing **an** der Wand *The picture was hanging on the wall*

am Berg *on the mountain(side)*

(compare: ***auf dem Berg*** ‘on the mountain-top’)

An der Grenze wird kontrolliert *There’s a check at the border*

Wir warteten **an** der Bushaltestelle *We were waiting at/by the bus stop*

am Fluss *on the river(side)*

(compare: ***auf dem Fluss*** ‘on the river’ (i.e. in a boat))

Ich stand **am** Fenster *I was standing by/at the window*

Sie wohnt **am** See *She lives by the lake*

(ii) *an* (+ dat.) is also used for ‘on (the underside of)’:

Die Lampe hängt **an** der Decke *The lamp was hanging from the ceiling*
am Himmel *in the sky*

(compare: **im** *Himmel* ‘in heaven’)

(iii) *an* (+ dat.) is used with institutions at which a person is employed:

Sie lehrt **an** der Universität Augsburg *She teaches at the University of Augsburg*

Er ist Intendant **am** Staatstheater *He is director at the State Theatre*

Er ist Pfarrer **an** der Peterskirche *He is the pastor at St. Peter’s*

(iv) In older German, *an* was often used in the sense of ‘down on’, and this is still apparent in some set phrases like *am Boden* ‘on the ground’, where *auf* is a possible alternative. Compare also *am Strand* ‘on the beach’, *am Ufer* ‘on the bank’, etc.

(v) *an* (+ dat.) is used in three phrases together with an adverb following the noun. In all these the dative is used since, although movement is involved, there is no indication of direction:

- **an** (+ dat.) ... **hin** expresses movement alongside (see also 7.2.5):

Sie gehen **an** der Mauer **hin** *They are walking along the wall*

- **an** (+ dat.) ... **vorbei** means ‘past’:

Wir gehen **an** seinem Haus **vorbei** *We are walking past his house*

- **an** (+ dat.) ... **entlang** means ‘along’, see 18.4.2b.

(b) *an* (+ dat.) is used in a number of time expressions

(i) *an* is used with nouns denoting days and parts of the day. It is always followed by a noun in the dative case when referring to time, and the definite article is always used with nouns in the singular, see 4.5c. In most contexts it corresponds

to English 'in' or 'on':

am Tag	<i>in the daytime</i>
am Montag, am Dienstag, ...	<i>on Monday, on Tuesday, ...</i>
an Wochentagen	<i>on weekdays</i>
am Morgen, am Nachmittag, am Abend	in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening
am 31. Oktober (see 8.5.3b)	<i>on the 31st of October</i>

(ii) *an* is used with *Tag*, etc. even in contexts where English has no preposition:

am Tag nach seinem Tod	<i>the day after his death</i>
An diesem Morgen war er schlecht gelaunt	That morning he was in a bad mood
am anderen Tag, am anderen Morgen	<i>the next day, the next morning</i>

(iii) *an* occurs in a few other contexts with reference to time:

Es ist an der Zeit, dass ...	<i>It is about time that ...</i>
am Anfang, am Ende	<i>at the beginning, at the end</i>
gleich am Anfang	<i>at the very beginning</i>

(iv) Other notes on usage:

- **in** is used with *Nacht*, see 18.3.7b.
- An accusative time phrase is often an alternative to a phrase with *an*, especially in spoken German, see 2.2.2.
- Combinations of the days of the week and nouns denoting parts of the day are written together, e.g. *am Donnerstagabend*.

(c) *an* (+ dat.) can be used to mean 'in respect of', 'in connection with'

This meaning is common in prepositional objects (see 16.5.2a), and with nouns

and adjectives (see 6.4.1):

Der Bedarf **an** Arbeitskräften *The demand for labour is decreasing*
verringert sich

Wir haben mehrere Millionen Euros **an** *We have several million euros worth*
Aufträgen vorliegen *of orders on the books*

Sie hat etwas Eigenartiges **an** sich *There's something strange about her*

Das Schönste **an** der Sache ist, dass ... *The best thing about it is that ...*

an (+ dat.) also often indicates the feature **by** which one recognizes or notices something:

Ich bemerkte **an** seinem Benehmen, dass ... *I noticed from his behaviour that ...*

Sie erkannte ihn **an** seinem Bart *She recognized him by his beard*

(d) *an* (+ dat.) can indicate a partially completed action

This often provides a way of indicating progressive action, see 12.5d:

Er strickt **an** einem Pullover *He's knitting a pullover*

Sie arbeitet **an** ihrer Dissertation *She's working on her thesis*

(e) Other uses of *an* (+ dat.)

(i) *am* is used to form the superlative of adverbs and predicate adjectives, e.g. *am schönsten*, *am einfachsten*, see 6.5.3a.

(ii) is used in informal registers with the infinitive to express a continuous action, e.g. *Sie ist am Schreiben*, see 12.5c.

18.3.3 *an* (+ accusative)

(a) *an* (+ acc.) indicates direction if the destination is *an* (+ dat.)

i.e. in contexts where the ultimate destination is a position 'on', 'at' or 'by' something.

(i) It most often corresponds to English 'to' (see 18.5.1c) or 'on':

Sie hängte das Bild **an** die Wand *She hung the picture on the wall*

Sie fuhr **an** die Küste *She drove to the coast*

Ich ging **ans** Fenster, **an** die Tür, **an** seinen Platz

Er kam **an** die Bushaltestelle, **an** den Waldrand

(ii) The idea of **right up to** somebody or something can be indicated by adding **heran**, see 7.2.4b:

Sie trat **an** mich, **an** den Tisch **heran** *She walked up to me, to the table*

(iii) *an* is also used with a person being addressed, for example being asked a question or requested to do something:

Er richtete diese Frage **an** mich *He addressed this question to me*

eine Bitte **an** den Bundeskanzler *a request to the Federal Chancellor*

Ich werde mich **an** ihn um Rat wenden *I shall turn to him for advice*

(b) Nouns from verbs which take a dative usually govern *an* (+ acc.)

See 16.4. The dative object of the verb appears in a prepositional phrase with *an*:

die Anpassung **an** die neuen Verhältnisse *adaptation to new circumstances*

Compare: *Er passt sich den neuen Verhältnissen an*

sein Befehl **an** die Truppen *his order to the troops*

Compare: *Er befahl den Truppen ...*

eine Antwort **an** mich ein Bericht **an** die Akademie

viele Grüße **an** Onkel Robert die Kriegserklärung **an** Japan

der Verkauf des Hauses **an** meinen Sohn sein Vermächtnis **an** seine Tochter

For the use of *an* (+ acc.) in this sense with verbs of sending and similar in place of a dative, see 16.4.1d.

(c) *an* (+ acc.) is used to indicate indefinite quantity

Er verdient **an die** 5000 im Monat *He earns getting on for 5000 a month*

an in this sense is often followed by the definite article. A following adjective has **strong** endings: *an die vierzig ausländische Gäste*.

(d) Idiomatic uses of *an* (+ acc.)

etwas ans Licht, an den Tag bringen *bring sth. to light*

an (und für) sich *actually*

die Erinnerung an seine Jugend *the memory of his youth*

der Glaube an den Sieg *the belief in victory*

For the use of *an* (+ acc.) in prepositional objects with verbs denoting mental processes, see 16.5.2b.

18.3.4 *auf* (+ dative)

(a) The basic meaning of *auf* (+ dat.) is ‘on (top of)’

For the distinction between *auf* and *an* (+ dat.), see 18.3.2a.

Das Buch liegt **auf** dem Tisch *The book is lying on the table*

Sie sind **auf** dem Mond gelandet *They landed on the moon*

Die Katze spielt **auf** dem Rasen *The cat is playing on the lawn*

auf dem Weg nach Stuttgart *on the way to Stuttgart*

(b) *auf* (+ dat.) is used for English ‘at’ or ‘in’ in some contexts

(i) ‘at’ formal occasions, e.g. weddings, conferences, parties, etc.:

Ich traf sie **auf** einem Empfang *I met her at a reception*

Wir lernten uns **auf** ihrer Hochzeit kennen *We met at their wedding*

Sie ist **auf** einer Tagung *She’s at a conference*

bei is a common alternative to *auf* in this sense, but there may be a slight difference in meaning, see **18.2.3b**.

(ii) with a few other nouns, where idiomatic usage can differ from English:

Die Schafe sind **auf** der Wiese *The sheep are in the meadow*

Er ist **auf** seinem Zimmer *He is (up) in his room*

auf dem Land(e) *in the country*

auf dem (Bauern)hof	<i>on the farm</i>	auf dem Gang	<i>in the corridor</i>
auf ihrer Bude	<i>in her bedsit</i>	auf seinem Gut	<i>on his estate</i>
auf dem Feld	<i>in the field</i>	auf dem Hof	<i>in the yard</i>
auf dem Flur	<i>in the (entrance) hall</i>	auf der Toilette	<i>on the toilet</i>

Note: *Die Kinder spielen auf der Straße* ‘The children are playing in the street’ but *in* (+ dat.) is used to refer to a particular street, e.g. *Wir wohnen in der Schillerstraße*.

(iii) with a few nouns denoting public buildings and places. *auf* is nowadays going out of use with some of these and the preposition which is coming to be

used more often is given in brackets:

auf dem Bahnhof (an)	auf dem Markt(platz)	auf dem Rathaus (in)
auf der Bank (in)	auf der Post	auf der Universität (an)
auf der Bibliothek (in)		

(c) Idiomatic uses of *auf* (+ dat.)

blind auf einem Auge *blind in one eye*

Das hat nichts/viel auf sich *There's nothing/a lot to that*

etwas auf dem Herzen haben *have sth. on one's mind*

auf der anderen Seite *on the other hand*

auf der Stelle *immediately*

18.3.5 *auf* (+ accusative)

(a) *auf* (+ acc.) indicates direction if the destination is *auf* (+ dat.)

i.e. it corresponds to English 'to' (or 'onto') in contexts where the ultimate goal of the person or thing will be a position 'on (top of)' or 'at' something:

Sie legte das Buch **auf** den Tisch *She put the book on the table*

Die Katze sprang **auf** das Dach *The cat leapt onto the roof*

This means that with nouns with which German uses *auf* (+ dat.) for English 'at' or 'in', *auf* (+ acc.) corresponds to English 'into' or 'to' (see also 18.5.1b):

Wir gingen **auf** das Feld *We went into the field*

Er ging **auf** sein Zimmer *He went (up) to his room*

Er geht **auf** die Toilette *He's going to the toilet*

(b) *auf* (+ acc.) ... *zu* indicates direction (i.e. = ‘towards’):

Sie kam **auf** mich **zu** *She came towards me/approached me*

Sie ging **auf** die Tore des Friedhofs **zu** *She went towards the cemetery gates*

(c) *auf* (+ acc.) indicates a period of time extending from ‘now’

In this usage it corresponds to English ‘for’. It is a less frequent alternative to *für*, see 18.1.3c, found mainly in formal registers, regionally and in some set phrases:

Sie fährt **auf** vier Monate in die
Schweiz
auf unbestimmte Zeit
auf ewig, **auf** immer

*She is going to Switzerland for three
months
indefinitely
for ever, for good*

(i) *auf* is used idiomatically in *auf die Minute (genau)* ‘(precisely) to the minute’.

(ii) The prepositional adverb *darauf* is used in the sense of ‘after(wards)’, see 7.3.1a, e.g. *am Tag darauf* ‘the day after’, ‘the following day’.

(iii) *auf* (+ acc.) is similarly used to indicate a distance from here, e.g. *Kurven auf fünf Kilometer* ‘bends for 5 kilometres’.

(d) *auf* (+ acc.) is used after a large number of adjectives and verbs

(see 6.4.1 and 16.5.3a), e.g. *Sie ist neidisch auf ihn* . *Ich habe vor dem Bahnhof auf sie gewartet*.

(e) *auf* (+ acc.) can denote ‘in response to’, ‘as a result of’

In this sense it is often strengthened by a following *hin*, see 7.2.3c:

Auf meine Bitte (**hin**) hat er die *At my request he kept the matter to*

Sache für sich behalten *himself*

Er hat sofort **auf** meinen Brief **hin** *He acted immediately following my*
gehandelt *letter*

auf Anfrage *on application*

auf meine Empfehlung (hin) *on my recommendation*

auf einen Verdacht hin *on the strength of a suspicion*

auf Wunsch, auf meinen Wunsch (hin) *by request, at my request*

daraufhin *as a result, thereupon*

(f) Other uses of *auf* (+ acc.)

(i) with languages:

Sie hat mir **auf Deutsch** geantwortet *She answered me in German*

in (+ dat.) is also used, especially with extended phrases:

Er hält seine Vorlesungen **in Deutsch/auf** *He gives his lectures in German*
Deutsch

Er sagte es **in gebrochenem Deutsch** *He said it in broken German*

Wie heißt das **in Ihrer Sprache** ? *What's that called in your language?*

(ii) to form absolute superlatives, e.g. *aufs angenehmste/Angenehmste*. See 7.7.2a for further details.

(iii) Idiomatic expressions with *auf* (+ acc.):

jdn. auf den Arm nehmen (S. Ger.)/ *pull somebody's leg*

auf die Schippe nehmen (N. Ger.)

etwas auf die lange Bank schieben *put sth. off*

auf den ersten Blick *at first sight*

Das kommt/läuft auf dasselbe hinaus *It comes down to the same thing*
auf jeden Fall, auf alle Fälle *in any case*
auf eigene Gefahr *at one's own risk*
auf eigene Kosten *at one's own expense*
jdm. auf die Nerven gehen, auf den *get on somebody's nerves*
Wecker gehen/fallen
Das geht auf meine Rechnung *This one's on me*
auf diese Weise *in this way*

18.3.6 *hinter*

(a) *hinter* is used to refer to place and usually corresponds to English 'behind' or 'beyond'

hinter indicates position with a following noun phrase in the dative case and direction with a noun phrase in the accusative:

Der Wagen steht **hinter** der Garage *The car is behind the garage*
Ich habe das Schlimmste **hinter** mir *I've got the worst behind me*
100 Kilometer **hinter** der Grenze *100 kilometres beyond the border*
Er fuhr den Wagen **hinter** die Garage *He drove the car round the back of the garage*
Sie trieben ihn **hinter** die Kirche *They drove him round the back of the church*

(b) To indicate movement in relation to another person or thing, *hinter* is used with *her*

See also 7.2.3b. The noun phrase is always in the dative case:

Er rannte **hinter** ihr **her** *He was running after her*

Ich ging **hinter** meinen Eltern **her** *I was walking behind my parents*

(c) Idiomatic expressions with *hinter*

Ich konnte nicht dahinter kommen *I couldn't get to the bottom of it*

Es muss etwas dahinter stecken *There must be something in it*

Schreib dir das hinter die Ohren! *Will you get that into your thick head!*

18.3.7 *in* (+ dative)

(a) The basic meaning of *in* (+ dat.) is 'in(side)'

Sie ist im Haus/ im Freien/ in der Kirche/ im Kino/ in der Stadt/ im Wald/ im Tal/ in ihrem Zimmer	<i>She is in the house / in the open air / in the church / in the cinema / in town/ in the forest / in the valley / in her room</i>
Sie sind in Bremen/ in Deutschland/ in der Schweiz/ im Ausland	<i>They are in Bremen / in Germany / in Switzerland / abroad</i>
Die Milch ist im Kühlschrank	<i>The milk is in the fridge</i>
Die Sonne geht im Westen unter	<i>The sun sets in the west</i>

In spoken German, *in* can be strengthened by adding *drin*, e.g. *Die sind in der Hütte drin*.

In some contexts, German idiom is different from English:

Ihr Büro ist im vierten Stock	<i>Her office is on the fourth floor</i>
Das habe ich im Fernsehen gesehen/ im Radio gehört	<i>I saw it on television / heard it on the radio</i>

German uses *in* with reference to attendance at public buildings and the like, where English uses 'at':

Die Kinder sind heute in der Schule	<i>The children are at school today</i>
--	---

Meine Eltern sind in der Kirche	My parents are at church
Elke ist im Theater/ in einem Konzert/	<i>Elke is at the theatre / at a concert / at</i>
im Kino/ im Rathaus/ in der	<i>the cinema / at the town hall / at the</i>
Bibliothek	<i>library</i>

(b) **in** (+ dat.) is used in a number of time expressions

(i) **in** can refer to a specific period of time or a length of time.

It is used with all words denoting periods of time **except** those with which **an** is used (see 20.2.3b), in particular with the names of the months and seasons (**always** with a definite article, see 4.5a), and with the following nouns:

der Augenblick die Epoche das Jahr das Jahrhundert die Minute
 der Monat die Nacht die Woche das Zeitalter

Examples of use:

im Augenblick, im letzten Augenblick	<i>at the moment, at the last moment</i>
im Jahre 1812	in 1812
in den letzten paar Jahren	in the last few years
in letzter Minute	at the last moment
im Mittelalter	in the Middle Ages
in der Nacht	at night
zweimal in der Woche	twice a week
in der Woche vor Weihnachten	in the week before Christmas
in der Vergangenheit	in the past
in Zukunft	<i>in future</i>

For the use of **in** or **zu** with **Zeit** and **Stunde**, see 18.2.9c.

The normal equivalent for English ‘in 1815’ in German is either *im Jahre 1815* or simply *1815*, with no preposition. However, the form *in 1815* is becoming widely used, although many Germans consider it to be quite incorrect.

(ii) **in** indicates a period of time within which something happens:

Ich habe die Arbeit in zwei Stunden gemacht	<i>I did the work in two hours</i>
In zwei Jahren ist der Umsatz um 40 Prozent gestiegen	In two years the turnover rose by 40%
im Lauf(e) der Zeit	in the course of time
Das kann man in zwei Tagen schaffen	<i>You can do that in two days</i>

(iii) **in** can indicate **the time after which something happens or is done:**

Er kommt in einer halben Stunde zurück	<i>He's coming back in half an hour</i>
heute in acht Tagen	a week today, in a week's time
Sie fliegt in ein paar Tagen nach Sydney	<i>She's flying to Sydney in a few days</i> (time)

In some contexts, *in* can be ambiguous, like English 'in', so that *in drei Tagen* can mean 'in the course of three days' or 'in three days' time'. This ambiguity can be avoided by using *binnen* or *innerhalb*, which mean 'within', e.g. *Der Rhein hat zum zweitenmal binnen 13 Monaten die Kölner Altstadt überschwemmt* (SZ).

(c) Idiomatic phrases with **in** (+ dat.)

in der Absicht, etwas zu tun	<i>with the intention of doing something</i>
im Allgemeinen	in general
im Durchschnitt	on average
nicht im Geringsten/Entferntesten	not in the slightest
in dieser Hinsicht	in this respect
in gewissem Maße	to a certain extent
in dieser Weise (<i>also auf diese Weise</i>)	in this way
in diesem Zusammenhang	<i>in this context</i>

18.3.8 **in** (+ accusative)

(a) **in** (+ acc.) indicates direction if the destination is **in** (+ dat.)

i.e. in contexts where the ultimate goal of the person or thing will be a position 'in(side)' something. It often corresponds to English 'into':

Sie ging ins Haus/ in die Kirche/ in den Wald/ in das Tal/ in ihr Zimmer	<i>She went into the house / the church / the forest / the valley / her room</i>
Ich habe die Milch in den Kühlschrank gestellt	<i>I put the milk in the fridge</i>

With *Richtung* the accusative or the dative case can be used: *in diese / dieser Richtung*.

in is a common equivalent of English 'to', if, on arrival, one will be **in** the place concerned, see 18.5.1a:

Sie ging in ein Konzert/ ins Kino/ in den vierten Stock	<i>She went to a concert / to the cinema / to the fourth floor</i>
Wir sind in die Schweiz/ ins Ausland gefahren	<i>We went to Switzerland / abroad</i>
Die Kinder gehen heute in die Schule	<i>The children are going to school today</i>

(b) Idiomatic phrases with *in* (+ acc.):

Der Vorteil springt ins Auge	<i>The advantage is obvious</i>
sich in Bewegung setzen	<i>begin to move</i>
mit jdm. ins Gespräch kommen	<i>get into conversation with sb.</i>
aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzen	<i>translate from French into German</i>

18.3.9 *neben*

(a) *neben* typically corresponds to English 'next to' or 'beside'

(i) Used with a following dative case, *neben* indicates position:

Die Blumen standen **neben** dem Schrank *The flowers were next to the cupboard*

Er saß **neben** seiner Frau *He was sitting next to his wife*

(ii) With a following accusative, *neben* indicates direction. It can be strengthened by adding *hin*, see 7.2.3a:

Er stellte die Blumen neben den Schrank (hin)	<i>He put the flowers (down) next to the cupboard</i>
Er setzte sich neben seine Frau (hin)	<i>He sat down next to his wife</i>

(b) *neben* with a following *her*

This combination is used when two people or things are moving in the same direction beside one another (see also 7.2.3b). The noun phrase is always in the **dative** case:

Er ging **neben** seiner Frau **her** *He was walking next to his wife*

(c) *neben* (+ dat.) can be used in the sense of ‘besides’, ‘apart from’

Its sense is close to that of *außer*, see 18.2.2a:

Neben zwei Franzosen waren alle Anwesenden aus Deutschland	<i>Apart from two Frenchmen all those present were from Germany</i>
---	---

(d) *neben* (+ dat.) can express a comparison

It is a common alternative to *gegen* or *gegenüber*, see 18.2.4c:

Neben ihrer Mutter ist sie groß *She's tall compared with her mother*

(e) The prepositional adverb *daneben*

daneben is used with verbs to express the idea of failing to hit a target. It is usually interpreted as a separable prefix, see 20.6.2, and written together with the verb:

Er hat danebengeschossen *He shot wide of the mark*

Sie hat sich danebenbenommen *She behaved quite abominably*

18.3.10 *über* (+ dative)

With a following noun phrase in the dative case, *über* corresponds to English ‘over’, ‘above’ or, in certain contexts, ‘across’ or ‘beyond’:

Das Bild hängt über meinem Tisch	<i>The picture hangs over my desk</i>
Briançon liegt 1400 Meter über dem Meeresspiegel	Briançon lies 1400 metres above sea level
Der Baum lag mir (quer) über dem Weg	The tree lay across my path
Er wohnt über der Grenze	He lives over/across the border
Sie wohnt über dem See	<i>She lives across/beyond the lake</i>

18.3.11 *über* (+ accusative)

(a) *über* (+ acc.) indicates movement over a person or object

über corresponds to English ‘above’, ‘over’, ‘across’ or (with reference to a journey) ‘via’:

Sie hängte das Bild über meinen Tisch	<i>She hung the picture over/above my desk</i>
Wir gingen über die Straße	We crossed the road
die neue Brücke über den Inn	the new bridge over/across the Inn
Der Baum fiel uns (quer) über den Weg	The tree fell across our path

Er ist **über** die Grenze geflüchtet
Wir sind **über** die Schweiz nach Italien
 gefahren
Dieser Zug fährt nach Stralsund **über**
 Rostock
Der Kaiser herrschte **über** viele Länder

He fled over the border
We drove to Italy through
 Switzerland
This train goes to Stralsund via
 Rostock
*The emperor ruled over many
 countries*

If the movement involved is parallel to a surface, **über** (+ acc.) can be strengthened by adding **hin**, see 7.2.3a:

Die Enten flogen **über** den See (**hin**) *The ducks were flying over the lake*

(b) über (+ acc.) is used in more abstract senses of ‘above’ or ‘beyond’

In the sense of going ‘beyond’, a limitation **über** can be strengthened by adding **hinaus**:

Diese Aufgabe geht **über** meine Fähigkeiten
 (**hinaus**)
Er liebt die Ruhe **über** alles
 darüber hinaus

*This task goes beyond my
 capabilities*
He likes quiet above all things
 over and above that

(c) über (+ acc.) occurs in a few time expressions in the sense of ‘over’

Sie ist **über** Nacht/ **übers** Wochenende
 geblieben
 über kurz oder lang

*She stayed overnight/over the
 weekend
 sooner or later*

It can be used **after** a noun in the accusative (see 2.2.2) to emphasize duration:

Sie blieb die ganze Nacht **über**

She stayed the whole night

die Schwäne, die den Winter über geblieben waren (<i>Surminski</i>)	<i>The swans which had stayed the whole winter</i>
---	--

(d) *über* (+ acc.) has the sense of ‘over’, ‘more than’ with quantities

e.g. *Es hat über tausend Euro gekostet; Kinder über zehn Jahre*, etc. See 8.1.6 for further details of this usage and the distinction between the adverbial and prepositional usage of *über* with quantities.

(e) *über* (+ acc.) is used in the sense of ‘about’, ‘concerning’

ein Buch über die europäischen Vögelarten	<i>a book about European bird species</i>
meine Freude über ihren Erfolg	my delight at her success
Er beschwerte sich über den kaputten Fernsehapparat	He complained about the broken television set
Sie war ärgerlich über ihn	<i>She was annoyed at him</i>

This usage is particularly frequent with nouns, adjectives (see 6.4.1b) and in the prepositional object of verbs of saying, etc. (see 16.5.9a).

18.3.12 *unter* (+ dative)

(a) *unter* (+ dat.) corresponds to English ‘under(neath)’, ‘beneath’, ‘below’

Manfred lag unter dem Tisch	<i>Manfred was lying under(neath) the table</i>
180 Meter unter dem Gipfel	<i>180 metres below the summit</i>
Das Land steht unter Wasser	<i>The land is under water</i>
Sie trug die Tasche unter dem Arm	<i>She was carrying her bag under her arm</i>

(b) *unter* (+ dat.) is a common equivalent for English ‘among(st)’

Hier bist du unter Freunden	<i>You’re among friends here</i>
Ich fand das Rezept unter meinen Papieren	I found the prescription among my papers
Unter den Zuschauern waren viele Ausländer	There were a lot of foreigners among the spectators
unter uns gesagt	between ourselves
unter vier Augen	in private
unter anderem (u.a.)	<i>amongst other things</i>

zwischen can also correspond to English ‘among(st)’, see 16.3.17a. It is preferred if *unter* could be understood to mean ‘under’. Compare:

Das Haus steht **unter** Bäumen *The house stands under some trees*

Das Haus steht **zwischen** Bäumen *The house stands amongst some trees*

(c) *unter* (+ dat.) indicates circumstances

unter diesen Umständen *under these circumstances*

unter allen Umständen *in any case*

unter den größten Schwierigkeiten *with the greatest difficulty*

unter diesen Bedingungen *on these conditions*

unter Vorspiegelung falscher Tatsachen *on false pretences*

(d) *unter* (+ dat.) has the sense of ‘under’, ‘below’ with reference to quantity

e.g. *Es hat unter tausend Euro gekostet.* See 8.1.6 for further details of this usage and the distinction between the adverbial and prepositional usage of *unter* with quantities.

18.3.13 *unter* (+ accusative)

(a) *unter* (+ acc.) indicates direction if the destination is *unter* (+ dat.)

i.e. where English has ‘under(neath)’, ‘below’, ‘among’:

Manfred kroch **unter** den Tisch *Manfred crawled under the table*

Sie steckte die Tasche **unter** ihren Arm *She put her bag under her arm*

Er tauchte den Kopf **unter** das Wasser *He dipped his head under the water*

Wir gingen **unter** die Brücke hindurch *We walked under the bridge*

Sie ging **unter** die Menge *She went among the crowd*

(b) Idiomatic expressions with *unter* (+ acc.)

jdn. *unter* die Arme greifen *come to sb.’s assistance*

sein Licht *unter* den Scheffel stellen *hide one’s light under a bushel*

etwas *unter* den Tisch fallen lassen *let sth. go by the board*

18.3.14 *vor* (+ dative)

(a) With reference to place, *vor* (+ dat.) means ‘in front of’, ‘ahead of’

Das Auto steht **vor** der Garage
Der Himalaja lag **vor** uns
vor ihm in einiger Entfernung
Die Insel Rügen liegt **vor** der
deutschen Ostseeküste

The car is in front of the garage
The Himalayas lay before us
some distance ahead of him
The island of Rügen lies off the Baltic
coast of Germany

(b) *vor* (+ dat.) with a following *her*

This combination is used when a person or thing is moving ahead of another in the same direction (see also 7.2.3b):

Vor uns **her** fuhr ein roter BMW *A red BMW was driving along ahead of us*

(c) *vor* is used in time expressions with the sense of ‘ago’ or ‘before’

vor einem Jahr, vor mehreren Jahren	<i>a year ago, several years ago</i>
vor langer Zeit, vor einiger Zeit	<i>a long time ago, some time ago</i>
vor kurzem	<i>not long ago, recently (see 7.3.5)</i>
gestern vor acht Tagen	<i>a week ago yesterday</i>
die Verhältnisse vor der Krise	<i>the conditions before the crisis</i>

In many contexts *her* can be used in the sense of English ‘ago’, e.g. *Es ist schon lange, einen Monat her* ‘It’s a long time, a month ago’. *Wie lange ist es (schon) her* ? ‘How long ago is it?’, see 7.2.5.

(d) *vor* can indicate cause or reason

In this sense, *vor* (+ dat.) normally occurs without a following article:

Man konnte vor Lärm nichts hören	<i>You couldn’t hear anything for the</i>
Ich konnte vor Aufregung nicht einschlafen	<i>noise</i>
Vor Nebel war nichts zu sehen	<i>I couldn’t get to sleep with the excitement</i>
blass vor Furcht, gelb vor Neid	<i>You couldn’t see anything for the fog</i>
	<i>pale with fear, green with envy</i>

In contrast to *aus*, see 18.2.1c, which points to a voluntary cause or reason, *vor* (+ dat.) always expresses a cause which is involuntary. This use of *vor* (+ dat.) is very common with adjectives, see 6.4.1, and in the prepositional object of verbs,

see 16.5.12.

18.3.15 *vor* (+ accusative)

(a) *vor* (+ acc.) indicates movement to the front of something or someone

Ich fuhr den Wagen **vor** die Garage *I drove up in front of the garage*

Sie stellte sich **vor** mich *She stepped in front of me*

Alle traten **vor** den Vorhang *Everyone stepped out in front of the curtain*

(b) *vor sich hin* means 'to oneself'

See also 7.2.5, e.g.:

Sie las **vor sich hin** *She was reading to herself*

Ich murmelte etwas **vor mich hin** *I muttered something to myself*

18.3.16 *zwischen*

(a) *zwischen* is used with reference to place or time in the sense of English 'between'

(i) *zwischen* (+ dat.) indicates position:

Ich saß zwischen dem Minister und seiner Frau	<i>I was sitting between the minister and his wife</i>
Die Tagung fand zwischen dem 4. und dem 11. Oktober statt zwischen den Zeilen lesen	<i>The conference took place between the 4th and the 11th of October read between the lines</i>

zwischen can also correspond to English ‘among(st)’ if more than two objects are involved:

Pilze wuchsen **zwischen** den Bäumen *Toadstools were growing among(st) the trees*

See 16.3.13b for the distinction between *unter* and *zwischen* to mean ‘among’.

(ii) ***zwischen* (+ acc.)** indicates **direction**:

Ich setzte mich zwischen den Minister und seine Frau	<i>I sat down between the minister and his wife</i>
Wir legen die Tagung zwischen den 4. und den 11. Oktober	<i>We are putting the conference between the 4th and the 11th of October</i>

(b) *zwischen* (+ dat.) with a following *her*

This combination is used when a person or thing is moving between others in the same direction (see also 7.2.3b). The noun phrase is **always in the dative case**:

Ich ging **zwischen** meinen Eltern **her** *I was walking between my parents*

(c) *zwischen* (+ dat.) has the sense of ‘between’ with reference to quantity

e.g. *Kinder zwischen dem 10. und dem 15. Lebensjahr*. See 8.1.6 for further details of this usage and the distinction between the adverbial and prepositional usage of *zwischen* with expressions of quantity.

18.4 Prepositions governing the genitive case

The prepositions governing the genitive fall into four groups:

- **four common prepositions**, dealt with in 18.4.1

(an)statt	trotz	während	wegen
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These are used with the genitive in formal registers, but the dative is often used in colloquial speech.

- the preposition **entlang**, dealt with in 18.4.2

Usage with *entlang* is extremely variable, with the accusative and dative also being used.

- **eight prepositions** expressing **place relationships**, dealt with in 18.4.3

außerhalb innerhalb	oberhalb unterhalb	diesseits jenseits	unweit
------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	--------

These are often used with a following *von* rather than a genitive.

- a **large number of prepositions with specialized meanings** which are used mainly in formal (especially official) registers. They are listed and explained in 18.4.4.

18.4.1 The four common prepositions which govern the genitive

(a) *(an)statt* ‘instead of’

The longer form *anstatt* is less frequent and it occurs chiefly in formal written German.

Statt eines Fernsehers hat sie sich ein teures Tablet gekauft	<i>Instead of a television she bought herself an expensive tablet</i>
Statt eines Briefes schickte er ihr eine Postkarte	<i>Instead of a letter he sent her a postcard</i>

(an)statt can be used as a **conjunction rather than a preposition**, i.e. as an alternative to *und nicht*. In this construction the noun or pronoun has the same

case as the noun or pronoun immediately preceding *(an)statt* with which it is linked:

In Aachen habe ich meinen Onkel Otto statt (= und nicht) meine Tante Käthe besucht Ihr Haus hat sie mir statt (= und nicht) ihm vermacht	<i>In Aachen I visited my uncle Otto instead of my aunt Käthe She left her house to me instead of to him</i>
---	--

(an)statt is always used like this if it links prepositional phrases or personal pronouns:

Ich schreibe jetzt wieder mit einem altmodischen Füller statt mit einem Filzstift	<i>I write with an old-fashioned fountain pen again now instead of with a felt-tip</i>
--	--

anstelle von is a common alternative to *(an)statt*. It can sound less stilted:

Wir essen jetzt Margarine anstelle von Butter	<i>We eat margarine instead of butter now</i>
--	---

For infinitive phrases with *(an)statt ... zu* and the conjunction *(an)statt dass* see 11.2.6c.

(b) *trotz* ‘despite’, ‘in spite of’

Wir sind am Sonntag trotz des starken Regens nach Eulbach gewandert	<i>We walked to Eulbach on Sunday despite the heavy rain</i>
--	--

(c) *während* ‘during’

während usually corresponds to English ‘during’:

Sie hat während der Aufführung geschlafen während der Wintermonate (<i>Bumke</i>)	<i>She slept during the performance during the winter months</i>
--	--

während des letzten Urlaubs, den sie in Italien verbracht hatten (<i>Walser</i>)	<i>during the last holiday which they had spent in Italy</i>
--	--

Unlike English ‘during’, *während* is not often used with simple time words like *Tag*, *Abend*, *Nacht* or *Jahr* if these just have a definite article with them. Compare:

am Tag, am Abend, in der Nacht	<i>during the day, during the evening, during the night</i>
--	---

However, *während* can be used with these nouns if there is an adjective with them, or if they are used with a determiner other than the definite article:

Während der letzten Nacht ist der Junge zweimal aufgewacht	<i>During the previous night the boy woke up twice</i>
während eines einzigen Tages	<i>during/in the course of a single day</i>

während indicates a period rather than simply duration, and it can be used in this sense in contexts where ‘during’ would be unusual in English:

während der ganzen Nacht	<i>throughout the night</i>
Andere Vogelarten wie der Star können während mindestens zweier Jahre Neues dazulernen (NZZ)	Other species of birds like starlings can learn new things over the course of at least two years
Während dreier Jahre verbrachten sie den Urlaub auf Sylt	<i>Three years running they spent their holidays on Sylt</i>

(d) *wegen* ‘because of’, ‘for the sake of’

(i) *wegen* normally precedes the noun it governs, but it sometimes follows in elevated registers:

Wir konnten wegen des Regens nicht kommen	<i>We couldn't come because of the rain</i>
Er musste wegen zu schnellen Fahrens	He had to pay a fine because he had been driving too fast

eine Geldstrafe bezahlen Er wich jeder Schafherde aus, nicht der Schafe wegen , sondern um den Geruch der Hirten zu umgehen (<i>Süßkind</i>)	<i>He kept away from all the flocks of sheep, not because of the sheep, but to avoid the smell of the shepherds</i>
--	---

(ii) *wegen* is sometimes used to mean ‘about’, ‘concerning’:

Wegen deiner Reise muss ich noch mit Gesine sprechen	<i>I’ve still got to talk to Gesine about your trip</i>
--	---

(iii) The combination **von** (+ gen.) ... **wegen** occurs in a few set phrases:

von Amts wegen	<i>ex officio</i>
von Berufs wegen	<i>by virtue of one’s profession</i>
von Rechts wegen	<i>legally, by rights</i>

(iv) The combination **von wegen** is common in informal registers to mean ‘because of’ or ‘concerning’. This usage is not generally considered standard:

Zunächst haben die Medien ordentlich kritisiert, von wegen schlechtes Management (<i>H. Pundt</i>)	<i>First of all there was some heavy criticism in the media, because of the bad management</i>
---	--

von wegen is very frequent in isolation in spoken German to challenge a previous statement:

Also, heute Abend bezahlst du alles. – Von wegen!	<i>So, you’re paying for everything tonight. – No way!</i>
---	--

For the forms of personal pronouns and demonstratives with *wegen* (*meinetwegen*, *ihretwegen*, etc.), see 3.1.2c and 5.1.1b.

(e) The use of (an)*statt*, *trotz*, *während* and *wegen* with a dative

(i) These prepositions are regularly followed by a noun phrase in the genitive in

standard German, and the use of the dative with them is generally considered unacceptable.

(ii) However, reflecting the general tendency to avoid the genitive in informal registers (see 2.3), they are frequently used with a following dative in **everyday speech**, e.g.:

Ich konnte **wegen dem Regen** nicht kommen

Während dem Mittagessen hat sie uns etwas über ihren Urlaub erzählt

(iii) The use of the dative is also tolerated in writing **in Switzerland**, e.g.:

Die Koalition wird deshalb vorerst wahrscheinlich trotz **dem neuerlichen Scheitern** überleben (NZZ)

An example like this would be almost unthinkable in a serious newspaper in Germany.

(iv) Nevertheless, there are some **contexts in which the use of the dative case is generally accepted** with these prepositions, even in formal written registers:

- if they are followed by a plural noun which is not accompanied by a declined determiner or adjective: *während fünf Jahren* , *wegen ein paar Hindernissen*
- if the noun they govern is preceded by a possessive genitive: *während Vaters kurzem Urlaub* , *wegen des ehemaligen Bundeskanzlers langem Schweigen*
- to avoid the use of the genitive of the personal pronouns, see 3.1.2: *Langsam fahren – wegen uns !* (on a road sign outside a kindergarten)
- to avoid consecutive genitives in -(e)s, see 2.4.2a: *trotz dem Rollen des Zuges (Th. Mann)*
- optionally, if the following noun has no determiner with it: *trotz Geldmangel(s)*, *wegen Amtsmissbrauch(s)*
- to achieve a particular stylistic effect: *Freies Denken statt starrem Lenken*

(election slogan)

- a relative pronoun after one of these prepositions can be in the dative: *seit dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs, während dem die Stadt Salzburg zahlreiche Bombenangriffe erleiden musste* (Baedeker)

18.4.2 *entlang*

entlang corresponds to English ‘along’. There is **considerable variation in usage** with it, both in respect of the **case** it governs and its **position before or after the noun**, and this has changed considerably in recent years.

(a) Case use with *entlang*

- (i) In writing, *entlang* is most frequently used with a **following** noun phrase in the **genitive** case, especially to indicate position alongside an extended object:

die Uferpromenade **entlang des** Rheins *the promenade along the bank of the Rhine*

(MM)

die Minenfelder **entlang der** Grenzen *the minefields along the frontiers to Turkey*

zur Türkei und zum Iran (SZ) *and Iran*

Bäume standen **entlang der** Bahnlinie *Trees stood along the railway line*

- (ii) A following noun phrase in the dative is rather less frequent, but not uncommon:

im Sommer, wenn **entlang den** *in summer when roses are blooming*

Boulevards und in den Vorgärten *along the boulevards and in the*

Rosen blühen (Zeit) *front gardens*

(iii) Very occasionally, *entlang* follows a noun phrase in the dative:

die Straße, die Mussolini **der Küste entlang** gebaut hat (Grzimek) *the road which Mussolini built along the coast*

Wir flogen gar nicht **der Küste entlang** (Frisch) *We were not flying along the coast at all*

This usage was frequent until fairly recently, but it is no longer common except in Switzerland.

(iv) *entlang* very often follows a noun phrase in the accusative:

Gehst du die Reihen der Maschinen entlang (ND)	<i>If you walk along the rows of machines</i>
Sie gingen den Bach entlang	<i>They were walking along the stream</i>
Sie hastete den Flur entlang bis zum Ende des Ganges (Johnson)	<i>She hurried along the entrance hall to the end of the corridor</i>
Flaschen und Gläser standen die lange Tafel entlang (Welt)	<i>Bottles and glasses were standing along the long table</i>

This is common in both spoken and written German, especially (but not only) to indicate movement along an extended object. In colloquial speech in North Germany *entlang* is often shortened to *lang*.

(b) *an* (+ dat.) ... *entlang* is a common alternative to simple *entlang*

It can be used with reference to position or movement:

Da gab es an der nördlichen Friedhofsmauer entlang den Bittweg (Grass)	<i>Along the north wall of the cemetery was the Bittweg</i>
Er steuerte am Ufer entlang , bis die Stelle gefunden war (Frisch)	<i>He steered along the bank until he had found the spot</i>

(c) Alternatives to *entlang* in the meaning ‘along’

entlang is used less frequently than English *along*, and the following are common equivalents:

(i) **an** (+ dat.), see 18.3.2a, often appears in contexts where English naturally uses ‘along’, e.g.:

An der Küste war das Wetter schön *The weather was fine along the coast*

(ii) **an** (+ dat.) ... **hin** can refer to movement alongside something, especially when one is very close to it or in contact with it:

Sie ging **an der Mauer hin** *She went along the wall*

Er rutschte **am Boden hin** *He slid along the floor*

(iii) *längs*, see 18.4.4, only expresses position. It governs a following genitive or (less commonly) a dative, e.g. *längs der Küste, längs des Flusses/dem Fluss*.

18.4.3 The eight prepositions denoting position

(a) Meaning and use

(i) **außerhalb** ‘outside’ and **innerhalb** ‘inside’, ‘within’ can refer to **place or time**:

Sie wohnt außerhalb der Stadt	<i>She lives outside the city</i>
Das liegt außerhalb / innerhalb meines Fachgebietes	That lies outside/within my specialist field
Das kann sie außerhalb der Arbeitszeit erledigen	She can finish that outside working hours
Das wird innerhalb eines Jahres geändert werden	<i>That will be changed within a year</i>

außerhalb and *innerhalb* only denote position, not direction. Compare:

Wir gingen aus der Hütte hinaus/ *We went outside/inside the hut*

in die Hütte hinein

Like *innen* (see 18.2.10b), *innerhalb* can be used to avoid potential ambiguity with *in*, see 18.3.7b.

(ii) **oberhalb** ‘above’ and **unterhalb** ‘below’, ‘underneath’ refer to position and are more specific than *über* and *unter*:

Oberhalb der Straße war ein Felsenvorsprung	<i>Above the road there was a rocky ledge</i>
Ich habe mich unterhalb des Knies verletzt der Rhein oberhalb / unterhalb der Stadt Basel	I injured myself below the knee <i>the Rhine above/below the city of Basle</i>

(iii) **beid(er)seits** ‘on either side of’, **diesseits** ‘on this side of’, **jenseits** ‘beyond’, ‘on the other side of’:

in den Bauten beidseits des Flusses (FR)	<i>in the buildings on either side of the river</i>
diesseits, jenseits der niederländischen Grenze	<i>on this side, the other side of the Dutch border</i>

hinter is more commonly used for ‘beyond’ than *jenseits*, especially in informal registers, e.g. *Das Dorf liegt hinter der Grenze, hinter Hannover*.

(iv) **unweit** ‘not far from’

Wir standen auf einer Höhe unweit des Dorfes	<i>We were standing on a hill not far from the village</i>
--	--

unfern, used with the genitive or the dative in the same meaning as *unweit*, is almost obsolete.

(b) All these prepositions are often used with *von* rather than the genitive

This is usual in spoken German, but it is also quite common in writing, although the genitive tends to be preferred in formal registers:

Sie wohnt **außerhalb von** der Stadt

Innerhalb von einem Jahr wird alles anders werden

Jenseits von der Grenze standen vier Vopos

ein Dorf **unweit von** Moskau (*Bednarz*)

Nevertheless, using *von* is the norm even in written German in those contexts where the common prepositions taking the genitive are used with the dative (see 18.4.1e), e.g. *innerhalb von fünf Jahren*.

A relative pronoun following these prepositions is very often in the dative rather than the genitive, e.g. *die Zone, innerhalb der* (less commonly: *derer*) *Autos verboten sind*.

18.4.4 Other prepositions governing the genitive

(a) Prepositions with the genitive in formal registers

The large number of other prepositions with the genitive are largely limited to formal, especially written registers, the majority in official and commercial language. Elsewhere they can sound stilted. However, the genitive case is very much associated with formal registers and seen as appropriate there, to such an extent that a number of prepositions, like *entlang*, *gegenüber* and *laut* have recently come to be used more often with the genitive, even where standard authorities consider this to be incorrect (as is particularly the case with *gegenüber*).

Many of the prepositions governing the genitive were originally adverbs,

participles or phrases which have only recently come to be used as prepositions, and similar new ones are constantly entering the language. With this proviso, the following list is as complete as possible.

abseits *away from*: eine Speisekarte abseits jeglicher Tradition (*Presse*)

† **abzüglich** *deducting, less*: abzüglich der Unkosten

anfangs *at the beginning of*: anfangs dieses Jahres (or with the acc.: *anfangs nächsten Monat*)

angesichts *in view of*: angesichts der wachsenden Konkurrenz aus Fernost (*MM*)

anhand (*also an Hand*): *with the aid of / from*: anhand einiger Beispiele

anlässlich *on the occasion of*: anlässlich seines siebenzigsten Geburtstages

anstelle (*also an Stelle*): *in place of, instead of*: anstelle einer Antwort (in speech: *anstelle von*)

aufgrund (*also auf Grund*): *on the strength of*: aufgrund seiner Ausbildung (in speech: *aufgrund von*)

† **ausschließlich** *exclusive of*: die Miete ausschließlich der Heizungskosten

ausweislich *according to*: Im Lesen sind die Deutschen ausweislich dieser Studie keineswegs Spitze (*SZ*)

behufs *for the purpose of*: behufs einer Verhandlung

betreffs, bezüglich *with regard to*: betreffs, bezüglich Ihres Angebotes

eingangs *at the beginning of*: eingangs dieses Jahres

eingedenk (*may precede or follow the noun*) *bearing in mind*: eingedenk seiner beruflichen Fehlschläge

† **einschließlich** *including*: einschließlich der Angehörigen (SZ)

† **exklusive** *excluding*: exklusive Versandkosten

fernab *far from*: fernab des Lärms der Städte

hinsichtlich *with regard to*: hinsichtlich Ihrer Anfrage

infolge *as a result of*: infolge der neuen Steuergesetze (often with *von*: *infolge von den Steuergesetzen*)

† **inklusive** *including*: inklusive Bedienung

inmitten *in the middle of*: ein neues Möbelhaus inmitten der Fußgängerzone (HAZ)

kraft *in virtue of*: kraft seines Amtes

längs *along(side)*: längs des Flusses (*less frequently*: längs dem Fluss)

links *on/to the left of*: links der Donau

† **mangels** *for want of*: Freispruch mangels Beweises

† **mittels** *by means of*: mittels eines gefälschten Passes

namens *in the name of*: Ich möchte Sie namens unseres Betriebes einladen

ob *on account of*: die Besorgnisse des sowjetischen Staatspräsidenten ob der deutschen Frage (Zeit)

plus *plus (commercial registers)*: 5 Prozent plus einer Topdividende von 0,75 Prozent (HAZ)

rechts *to/on the right of*: rechts der Isar

seitens *on the part of*: seitens der Bezirksverwaltung

seitlich *to/at the side of*: seitlich der Hauptstraße

unbeschadet (*after or before the noun*) *regardless of*: unbeschadet des enttäuschenden Ergebnisses (*Presse*)

ungeachtet (*after or before the noun*) *notwithstanding*: ungeachtet unserer üblichen Skepsis (*Dönhoff*)

vermöge *by dint of*: vermöge seines unermüdlichen Fleißes

vorbehaltlich *subject to*: vorbehaltlich seiner Zustimmung

zeit (*only in set phrases with* das Leben) *during*: zeit seines Lebens

zugunsten (*also zu Gunsten*) *for the benefit of*: eine Sammlung zugunsten der Opfer des Faschismus

zuungunsten (*also zu Ungunsten*) *to the disadvantage of*: Die Richter urteilen meist zuungunsten der Skisportler (*MM*)

† **zuzüglich** *plus*: Es kostet 1800 Euro *zuzüglich* der Versandkosten

† **zwecks** *for the purpose of*: Er besuchte sie *zwecks* einer gründlichen Erörterung der Situation

† These prepositions are used with a following dative case in the same contexts as the common prepositions, see 18.4.1e.

(b) Special cases: halber and um ... willen

These two prepositions, which are typical of elevated, especially literary registers, have special forms.

(i) **halber** ‘for the sake of’ follows the noun, e.g. *der Wahrheit halber*.

It can be **compounded with nouns** to form adverbs, e.g. *sicherheitshalber* ‘for

safety's sake', *urlaubshalber* 'for a holiday', *vorsichtshalber* 'as a precaution'.

When used **with pronouns** *halber* appears as *-halben* and is compounded with forms of the pronoun in - *t*, e.g. *meinethalben* 'for my sake', 'for all me', see 3.1.2c and 5.1.1b.

(ii) **um ... willen** *for the sake of* has a noun between its two parts, e.g. *um meiner Mutter willen*.

It is compounded with special forms of the personal pronouns in - *t*, e.g. *um meinetwillen*, see 3.1.2c and 5.1.1b.

18.5 German equivalents for English 'to'

English 'to' has a number of possible German equivalents depending on context, and the use of each of these is summarized here for convenience. Fuller details and further examples can be found in earlier sections under the relevant German prepositions.

18.5.1 *an, auf or in* (+ accusative)

The choice between *an*, *auf* or *in* with a noun phrase in the accusative case to mean 'to' depends on which of these prepositions would be **used with the dative to express position** 'in' or 'at' the place concerned after you get there. Thus:

(a) *in* (+ accusative) is used for going 'to' places where you will then be inside

i.e. (*in* + dative):

Sie geht **ins** Büro/ **ins** Dorf/ **ins** Kino/ **in** die Kirche/ **in** ein Museum/

ins Restaurant/ **in** die Schule/ **in** die Stadt/ **in** den Zoo, etc.

In this way, *Ich gehe in die Kirche* means ‘I am going to church’ in the sense of going in to a service. If you are just going up to the church, you would say: *Ich gehe an die Kirche* or *Ich gehe zur Kirche*.

(b) *auf* (+ accusative) is used for going ‘to’ certain places and events

in particular those where *auf* (+ dative) is used to say you are ‘at’ them.

(i) The use of *auf* is idiomatic with many nouns:

Die Schafe gingen **auf** die Wiese *The sheep went into the meadow*

Wir fahren **aufs** Land *We’re going to the country*

Die Kinder gingen **auf** die Straße *The children went into the street*

Similarly:

auf den Berg	<i>up the mountain</i>	auf sein Gut	<i>to his estate</i>
auf den (Bauern)hof	to the farm	auf den Hof	into the yard
auf ihre Bude	to her bedsit	auf die Jagd gehen	go hunting
auf den Flur	into the hall	auf die Toilette	<i>to the toilet</i>
auf den Gang	<i>into the corridor</i>		

With all these, *auf* (+ dative) is used to indicate presence ‘in’ or ‘on’ them, see **18.3.4b**.

(ii) *auf* (+ accusative) can also be used for going ‘to’ formal occasions (e.g. weddings, conferences, parties, etc.):

Sie ging **auf** einen Empfang, **auf** eine Hochzeit, **auf** eine Party, **auf** eine Tagung

Although *auf* (+ dative) can be used to denote presence ‘at’ such functions, see **18.3.4b**, *zu* is now as frequent as *auf* (+ accusative) to express going ‘to’ them, especially in less formal registers.

(iii) *auf* (+ accusative) is used for going 'to' certain public buildings:

Sie ging **auf** den Bahnhof, **auf** die Bank, **auf** die Bibliothek, **auf** die Post,
auf das Rathaus, **auf** die Universität

With many of these words, *auf* occurs chiefly in more formal registers or in Austrian usage (see 18.3.4b and 18.3.5a). *zu* is regularly used in its place, although *an* (+ accusative) is frequent with *Universität*.

(c) *an* expresses direction 'to' a precise spot or objects which extend lengthways

(i.e. rivers, shores, etc.). *an* expresses movement to a point adjacent to the object concerned. You are then *an* (+ dative) that point, i.e. 'at' it, see 18.3.2a. Examples:

Er ging **an den** Tisch
Sie kam **an die** Bushaltestelle
Sie ging **an die** Grenze
Wir fahren **ans** Meer

Er steht **an dem** Tisch
Sie traf ihn **an der** Bushaltestelle
An der Grenze wurde kontrolliert
Wir verbringen unseren Urlaub **am** Meer

Similarly:

Er eilte **ans** Fenster Er ging **an** die Kasse

Wir kamen **an** die Front Sie ging **ans** Ufer

Sie geht **ans** Mikrophon/ **an** ihren Platz/ **an** die Straßenkreuzung/ **an** die Tür/ **an** die Tafel/

an die Stelle wo der Tote aufgefunden wurde

Sie gehen **an** den Fluss/ **an** die Mosel/ **an** den Strand/ **an** den See/ **an** die Theke/ **an** den Zaun

18.5.2 *zu*

(a) *zu* is often used in place of the more precise prepositions *an*, *auf* and *in*

(see 18.5.1). It is rather vaguer than these three prepositions and tends to emphasize general direction rather than reaching the objective. It is particularly frequent in colloquial registers.

(i) *zu* is used rather than *in* if one is just going up to the place involved (but not necessarily going inside), or to emphasize the general direction rather than reaching the place:

Ich ging **zum** neuen Kino und wartete auf ihn

Die Straßenbahn fährt **zum** Zoo

(ii) *zu* is in practice more common than *auf* in current (especially informal) usage with reference to functions and public buildings:

Er geht **zu** einem Empfang/ **zu** einer Tagung/ **zu** einer Party

Wir gehen **zum** Bahnhof/ **zur** Bank/ **zur** Post/ **zum** Rathaus/ **zur** Universität

(iii) *zu* is used rather than *an* if the emphasis is on general direction rather than arriving adjacent to the place concerned:

Ich begleite sie **zur** Fabrik Er geht **zum** Fenster, **zur** Tür

Sie geht **zu** ihrem Platz Er schlendert **zur** Theke

(b) *zu* is always used with reference to people

i.e. going up to someone, or to their house or shop

Sie geht **zu** ihrem Onkel/ **zu** ihrer Freundin

Er geht **zu** Fleischers/ **zu** seinem Chef

Wir gehen **zum** Bäcker frische Semmeln kaufen

18.5.3 Equivalents for English ‘to’ with geographical names

(a) *nach* is used with neuter names of continents, countries and towns

i.e. those which are used without an article (see 18.2.6a):

Wir fahren **nach** Amerika, **nach** Frankreich, **nach** Duisburg

(b) *in* (+ accusative) is used with names of countries, etc. which are used with an article

Most of these are feminine, but a few are masculine, neuter or plural, see 4.4.1:

Sie reist morgen **in** die Schweiz, **in** den Jemen (or *nach* Jemen), **in** das Elsass, **in** die USA

(c) Various prepositions are used with other geographical names

In particular *in*, *an* or *auf* (+ acc.) are used in the same way as with other nouns, see 18.5.1, depending on whether one will be *in*, *an* or *auf* (+ dat.) on arrival:

Wir fahren **in** die Alpen, **in** den Harz

Wir gingen **auf** den Feldberg, **auf** die Jungfrau

Wir wollen im Sommer **an** den Bodensee, **an** die Riviera fahren

Word order

German word order is different to English and it has a different role in determining how sentences are constructed.

English uses word order to identify the SUBJECT and the OBJECT (S) of the verb. In English, the subject must come first, before the verb, and the objects after it, in the order indirect object + direct object. In a sentence like

My father has lent our neighbour the old lawnmower

We cannot move the elements round without saying something different, so that, for example, *Our neighbour lent my father the old lawnmower* has another meaning. In German, various permutations are possible without changing the essential meaning:

- **Mein Vater** hat ***unserem Nachbarn** den alten Rasenmäher* geliehen
- **Unserem Nachbarn** hat **mein Vater** *den alten Rasenmäher* geliehen
- *Den alten Rasenmäher* hat **mein Vater** ***unserem Nachbarn*** geliehen
- **Mein Vater** hat *den alten Rasenmäher* **unserem Nachbarn** geliehen

In German the case endings, not the word order, tell us who is doing what to whom, i.e. what is the subject and what are the objects. **The order of the words and phrases can be changed round to give a different emphasis to the elements without altering the basic meaning.** The last variant, for example, stresses who is being lent the lawnmower. In German, the position of the verb is

fixed, and the other elements can be moved in order to show different emphases.

Nevertheless, the various elements do tend to come in a particular order – but this is a tendency rather than a rule of grammar. This chapter shows first this ‘neutral’ basic order, and then how it can be varied to give a different emphasis:

- the **three basic clause structures**, with the finite verb in different positions (section 19.1)
- the use of **first position** in main clauses to highlight an important element (section 19.2)
- the position of the **other elements** in the clause (sections 19.3–19.8)
 - the position of **noun** and **pronoun subject** and **objects** (section 19.4)
 - the position of **adverbials** (section 19.5)
 - the position of **nicht** and other negative elements (section 19.6)
 - the position of other verb **complements** (section 19.7)
 - placing elements **after the verb** at the end of the clause (section 19.8)

Although we usually speak of ‘**word**’ order, what is involved is often a **phrase** of some kind rather than a single word. For example, time adverbials tend to come in a particular place whether they are single words, like *heute*, or phrases like *den ganzen Tag* or *am kommenden Dienstag*. In order to cover these possibilities, we refer to these segments of the clause as **elements**. In German they are called *Satzglieder*.

[19.1 Clause structure and the position of the verb](#)

A basic feature of German word order is that the various parts of the verb have a fixed position in the clause.

19.1.1 The three basic clause structures of German

There are **three clause types** in German and these differ in the **place of the FINITE VERB**:

- **main clause statements:** *Petra kommt nach Erfurt*

The finite verb is the **second** element

- **questions and commands:** *Kommt Petra nach Erfurt? Kommen Sie nach Erfurt!*

The finite verb is the **first** element

- **subordinate clauses:** *Ich weiß, dass Petra nach Erfurt kommt*

The finite verb is the **last** element

(a) Main clause statements

In main clauses the finite verb is the **second element**. This means that **only one element**, whether it is a single word, a phrase, or a whole clause, comes before the finite verb. All other parts of the verb, i.e. infinitives, past participles or separable prefixes, are placed at the end of the clause, as shown in [Table 19.1](#):

[Table 19.1](#) The position of the verb in main clauses

Initial position	Verb ¹	Other elements	Verb ²
Monika	kommt	eben aus der Bäckerei	fahren
Morgen	muss	ich mit dem Zug nach Brüssel	hinaus
Nach einiger Zeit	blickte	sie zum Fenster	gekauft
Gestern	habe	ich fünf neue Apps	gespielt
Als sie klein war,	hat	sie oft mit Claudia	

Noun clauses with *dass* omitted (see 17.2.1b) have the same order as main clause statements:

Sie glaubt, sie hat ihn gestern in der Stadt gesehen

There are some exceptions to the rule that the finite verb must be the second element. These are explained in 19.2.1c.

The order of infinitives and participles at the end of the clause when there is more than one of these is explained in 19.1.3.

(b) Questions and commands

In questions and commands the finite verb is the first element. As in main clause statements, any other parts of the verb are in final position, as shown in [Table 19.2](#). In some questions, the verb is preceded by an INTERROGATIVE (i.e. a *w*-word like *was*, *was für ein* ..., etc.):

[Table 19.2](#) The position of the verb in questions and commands

w-word	Verb ¹	Other elements	Verb ²
Was Welches Buch Was für eine Stadt	Kommt Musst Hat Fangen Pass hast sollen ist	sie bald? du schon dich Peter schon Sie sofort doch an der Kreuzung du da schon wieder wir zuerst Bochum?	gehen? gesprachen? an! auf! angestellt? lesen?

Conditional clauses with no *wenn* (see 14.3.3a), and **comparative clauses** introduced simply by *als*, see 14.5.1b, have the same order, with the finite verb in first position, e.g.:

Hätte ich Zeit, so würde ich gern mit euch nach Italien fahren

Es war mir, als wäre ich hoch über der Erde

(c) Subordinate clauses

In subordinate clauses the finite verb is the final element. The clause is introduced by a conjunction in first position and other parts of the verb come immediately before the finite verb at the end of the clause:

[Table 19.3](#) The position of the verb in subordinate clauses

Conjunction	Other elements	Verb ²	Verb ¹
weil (der Mann), der ob dass dass ohne	ich gestern krank in der Ecke allein sie diesen neuen Top er den Brief sofort er morgen den Stuhl in die Ecke ihrem Freund	gekauft tippen helfen	war steht hat? soll kommt zu stellen zu können

As [Table 19.3](#) shows, non-finite clauses with an **infinitive with *zu*** (see 11.2) have the same order as subordinate clauses, with the verb last. There is no conjunction at the beginning of the clause, but there may be a preposition like *ohne* or *um*.

Clauses with participles follow the same pattern, with the verb last:

Den Schildern folgend, fanden sie das Krankenhaus (*Walser*);

eine Betonburg, wie von einem anderen Stern in diesen Wald gefallen (*Walser*)

Some exclamations introduced by an interrogative word have the form of questions **or** subordinate clauses, e.g. *Wie der Chef darüber geschimpft hat!* or *Wie hat der Chef darüber geschimpft!*

19.1.2 The ‘verbal bracket’

As [Table 19.4](#) shows, a typical feature of German is that most elements in the clause are sandwiched between the various parts of the verb in main clauses, or between the conjunction and the parts of the verb in subordinate clauses. This construction is known as the ‘**VERBAL BRACKET**’.

This bracket forms the basic framework for all German clauses, and the order of all the other elements in the clause can be described in relation to it:

[Table 19.4](#) The ‘verbal bracket’

Initial position	Bracket ¹ [	Other elements	Bracket ²]
Heute	darf	sie mit uns ins Kino	kommen
Ich	habe	sie zufällig in der Stadt	gesehen
Ich	komme	morgen gegen zwei Uhr noch	vorbei
...	Darf	sie heute mit uns ins Kino	kommen?
...	Hast	du sie zufällig in der Stadt	gesehen?
...	Komm	doch morgen gegen zwei Uhr	vorbei
...	ob	sie heute mit uns ins Kino	kommen darf
...	weil	ich sie heute zufällig in der Stadt	gesehen habe
...	dass	du morgen gegen zwei Uhr noch	vorbeikommst

[Tables 19.1–19.3](#) have more examples of verbal brackets. The construction has some typical features:

- In main clauses there is only **one element in initial position** before the first ‘bracket’ formed by the verb. This position is called the *Vorfeld* in German; its function is explained in 19.2.
- **All other elements** (and this means all elements in questions, commands and subordinate clauses) are positioned **within the bracket**. In German, this is called the *Mittelfeld*.

As the examples in [Table 19.4](#) show, the order of elements in the *Mittelfeld* is exactly the same for all clause types and it is explained in 19.3 – 19.7.

- Under certain conditions elements can be placed **after the closing bracket**, i.e. after the part of the verb which is at the end, e.g. *Ich rufe an aus London*; *Hat sie dich angerufen aus London* ?; *Ich weiß, dass sie dich angerufen hat aus London*. This position is called the *Nachfeld* in German. Its use is explained in section 19.8.

19.1.3 The order of verbs in final position

If there is more than one part of the verb at the end of the clause, the order of these is fixed.

(a) Main clause statements and questions

In main clauses, the **auxiliary verb** comes **after the main verb**, as shown in [Table 19.5](#):

[Table 19.5](#) Final position in main clauses

Initial	Finite verb	Other elements	Main verb	Auxiliary verb
Ich Sie	werde hat Ist Soll	es ihr doch ihn voriges Jahr dir das schon dieser Brief heute noch	sagen schwimmen erklärt geschrieben	müssen gelernt worden? werden?

(b) Subordinate clauses

In subordinate clauses the **finite verb** is placed **at the end**, after any **infinitives** or **participles**. The main verb comes before the infinitive or past participle of an auxiliary verb:

[Table 19.6](#) Final position in subordinate clauses (two verbs)

Conjunction	Other elements	Main verb	Auxiliary	Finite verb
Da ..., weil ..., dass ..., wie (das Haus), das ..., dass (das Haus), das	ich sie zufällig er mir das Geld sie mit uns ins Kino sie den Brief sie mir das schon heute noch	gesehen leihen gehen fallen verkaufen erklärt verkauft	 worden werden	habe wird darf ließ wird sollte muss

However, if there are **two infinitives** at the end of the clause (see 11.3.2 and 15.1.2), the **finite verb comes before both**:

[Table 19.7](#) Final position in subordinate clauses (three verbs)

Conjunction	Other elements	Finite verb	Main verb	Auxiliary
(Ich weiß), dass	er es bald	wird	erledigen	müssen
(der Brief), den	sie	hat	fallen	lassen
..., weil	er die Probleme	soll	lösen	können
(das Haus), das	sie	hätte	verkaufen	sollen
..., dass	Paul ihn	hat	kommen	hören

(i) The auxiliary *werden* can also be placed **after** the other verbs, e.g.:

dass er es bald erledigen müssen **wird**

(ii) This rule also applies with *lassen*, *hören* and *sehen* if their infinitive is substituting for a past participle (see 11.3.1):

der Brief, den sie **hat** fallen lassen

With these verbs, though, it is also possible for the finite verb to be placed at the end:

der Brief, den sie fallen lassen **hat**

(iii) In Austria, the finite verb is often placed **between** the main verb and the auxiliary:

der Flughafen, wo die Luftraumsperre von Mitternacht bis 5 Uhr dauern hätte sollen (*Standard*)

(iv) In those rare cases where there are more than two infinitives or participles the finite verb usually also precedes them:

Tragisch ist, dass der Mann möglicherweise **hätte** gerettet werden können (SZ)

(v) Words or phrases which are very closely connected to the main verb,

especially the noun portion of phrasal verbs, see 19.7.2, may be placed between the finite verb and the auxiliaries and participles:

Es gab einen Unterschied, den Gregorius immer deutlicher spürte, je weiter die Nacht fortschritt, ohne dass er ihn **hätte in Worte fassen können** (P. Mercier)

There was a difference which Gregorius felt more and more strongly as the night wore on but he would not have been able to put it into words

19.1.4 Clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction

i.e. clauses linked by a conjunction such as **aber**, **oder** or **und** (see 17.1).

(a) In coordinated main clauses, the verb is in second position in both

Zu Hause **schreibt** Mutter Briefe und Vater **arbeitet** im Garten

Am Abend **blieb** ich in meinem Zimmer, aber ich **konnte** nicht arbeiten

Du **kannst** mit uns ins Kino kommen oder du **kannst** zu deiner Freundin gehen

If the subject of clauses linked by *sondern* or *und* is identical, it can be omitted ('understood'):

Wir **gingen** nicht ins Kino, sondern **arbeiteten** im Garten

Jürgen **kam** um vier Uhr in Soest an und **ging** sofort zu seiner Freundin

However, if the second clause has another element in initial position, the subject **must** be inserted again after the verb and cannot be omitted. This is different from English, where the subject can still be understood even if another element comes before the verb. Compare:

Ich schrieb ein paar Briefe und dann ging ich zu meiner Tante	<i>I wrote a few letters and then went to my aunt's</i>
---	---

If an element other than the subject comes in initial position, before the verb, it can be left out (and taken as understood) in following coordinated clauses. The following clauses begin with the verb, and the subject is repeated after it. This stresses that the initial element applies equally to all the clauses:

Schon im April demonstrierten die Bauern, blockierten **sie** Straßen in Ost-Berlin und protestierten **sie** vor der Volkskammer (*Zeit*)

As early as April the farmers demonstrated, blocked streets in East Berlin and protested in front of the Volkskammer

In this example, *Schon im April* is here being taken to apply to **all three** coordinated clauses.

However, if no need is felt to emphasize that the initial phrase also applies to the second or subsequent clauses, the subject is placed before the second verb. In practice this is much more usual, especially outside formal written German:

An dem Abend blieb ich zu Hause und **meine Schwester ging** ins Kino

That night I stayed at home and my sister went to the cinema

(b) Parallel subordinate clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions

In these, the verb is in final position in both clauses:

Ich weiß, dass sie gestern krank **war** und dass ihr Mann deswegen zu Hause geblieben **ist**
Wenn deine Familie dagegen **ist** oder wenn du keine Zeit **hast**, dann wollen wir den Plan fallen lassen

*I know that she was ill yesterday and that's why her husband stayed at home
If your family is against it or if you don't have time, then we'll drop the plan*

If the two clauses have compound tenses with the same auxiliary, the auxiliary can be omitted in the first one:

Nachdem ich Tee **getrunken** und eine Weile
gelesen hatte, machte ich einen kurzen
Spaziergang

*After I had had tea and read for
a while, I went for a short walk*

19.2 Initial position in main clause statements

19.2.1 The finite verb is the second element in main clauses

The ‘verb second’ rule is a basic feature of German word order, and the finite verb in main clauses thus constitutes the first part of the ‘verbal bracket’ (see 19.1.2).

(a) Only one element can come before the finite verb

This sentence structure is very different from English, where the subject has to come before the verb, because that is the only way we can tell it is the subject. However, in English other elements can come before the subject, so that there can be several elements in front of the verb:

- **Then** she began to read the letter
- **Then, unwillingly**, she began to read the letter
- **Then, unwillingly, when she had shut the door**, she began to read the letter

In the equivalent German sentences, all but one of these elements has to be moved to another position, so that the **verb stays in second place**, e.g. (among several other possible permutations):

- **Dann** begann sie den Brief zu lesen

Sie begann dann den Brief zu lesen

- **Widerwillig** begann sie dann den Brief zu lesen

Dann begann sie widerwillig den Brief zu lesen

- **Nachdem sie die Tür geschlossen hatte**, begann sie dann widerwillig den Brief zu lesen

Dann begann sie widerwillig den Brief zu lesen, nachdem sie die Tür geschlossen hatte

Because of this fundamental difference, corresponding sentences in English and German often have a very different form.

(b) Many types of element can occur in initial position

The subject is often the most natural element to occur in initial position. It has been estimated that two thirds of main clause statements in German in all registers begin with the subject, and it is not unusual for a whole sequence of sentences to begin with the subject:

Tobias zog heftig an seiner Pfeife. **Die Spucke im Mundstück** prasselte; **man** hörte es, obwohl jetzt, immer deutlicher, auch noch das Schießen der anderen hinzukam... **Sie** waren am Kahn. **Tobias** bückte sich und ließ das Kettenschloss aufschnappen. **Die Luft überm See** flimmerte. **Der Milan hoch oben** tat keinen Flügelschlag. (*Schnurre*)

However, it is quite wrong to think of the order subject + finite verb as the ‘normal’ order (as it is in English), and thus imply that it is ‘abnormal’ for something else to come before the verb.

Almost all types of element except the negative *nicht* and the modal particles can naturally come first in a main clause. We can illustrate this by giving examples of the elements which are common in first position in main clauses.

- (i) an accusative or dative object. This can be a (stressed) pronoun, but it is more usually a noun phrase:

Ihn nahm er zuletzt nach Prag mit (*Hildesheimer*)

Ihr war das Bett viel zu klein

Das Verfahren gegen ihn deutet er als weiteren Beleg für die politische Verfolgung (*Spiegel*)

Mariken hat es sehr Leid getan (*Surminski*)

(ii) an **adverbial** (a single adverb or a phrase):

Natürlich kannte er sämtliche Parfum- und Drogenhandlungen der Stadt (*Süßkind*)

Trotz den feierlichen Londoner Erklärungen wird weiter gekämpft (*NZZ*)

Time and **place adverbials** are especially frequent in initial position:

An dem Abend kam ich mit Mahler in den „Kronenkeller“ (*Bachmann*)

In vielen Städten sind kostenlose Parkplätze Mangelware

(iii) another **complement of the verb**, i.e. a genitive object, a prepositional object, a place or direction complement or a predicate complement (see [Table 16.1](#)):

Zu einem bedauerlichen Zwischenfall kam es, als ... (*Zwerenz*)

Ins Theater/Dahin komme ich jetzt nur sehr selten

Ein guter Kerl ist er trotz alledem

(iv) a prepositional phrase dependent on a noun later in the clause:

Über den Ernst der Lage hat aber auch er keinen Zweifel (*FR*)

(v) the infinitive or participle of a compound tense. This gives particularly strong emphasis to the verb:

Anzeigen wird sie ihn (*Fallada*)

Abgefunden mit ihrer Lage haben sich 16,6 Prozent der Frauen (*LV*)

(vi) a noun belonging with a quantifying determiner later in the clause. This

emphasizes the noun very strongly:

Personen wurden nach Polizeiangaben keine verletzt (*NZZ*)

Menschen sind um diese Zeit wenige unterwegs (*Gaiser*)

Occasionally this construction is found with adjectives, e.g.:

Beweise hat er äußerst triftige gebracht

(vii) part of a **phrasal verb**:

Sehr leid hat es mir getan

Zur Abstimmung ist dieser Vorschlag nicht gekommen

(viii) a **subordinate clause**. This can be a finite or non-finite clause

Wohin sie dich gebracht haben, weiß ich nicht (*Surminski*)

Den Schildern folgend, fanden sie das Krankenhaus (*Walser*)

Ihr Geld zu leihen, habe ich doch nie versprochen

(c) Exceptions to the ‘verb second’ rule

There are a few contexts where more than one element is possible in initial position. In practice, these are only apparent exceptions in special kinds of construction, i.e.:

(i) Interjections, the particles *ja* and *nein*, and names of persons addressed. As these can be thought of as standing outside the clause proper they are placed before the initial element and followed by a comma, e.g.:

Ach, es regnet schon wieder

Du liebe Zeit, da ist sie ja auch

Ja, du hast Recht

Nein, das darfst du nicht

Karl, ich habe dein Buch gefunden

Lieber Freund, ich kann nichts dafür

(ii) Some other words or phrases link up a clause with what has just been said or the general context. They are seen as standing outside the clause and placed before the initial element with a comma:

Kurzum, die Lage ist nun kritisch

Wissen Sie, ich habe sie nie richtig kennen gelernt

The most frequent words and phrases which can be used like this are:

das heißt (d.h.)	<i>that is (i.e.)</i>	so	<i>well now, well</i>
im Gegenteil	on the	unter uns gesagt	<i>then</i>
kurz, kurzum, kurz gesagt, kurz	contrary	weiß Gott	between
und gut	in short	wie gesagt	ourselves
mit anderen Worten	in other	wissen Sie,	Heaven knows
nun, na	words	weißt du	as I said
sehen Sie, siehst du	well	zugegeben	you know
	<i>d'you see</i>		<i>admittedly</i>

Some words or phrases can be used like the group above, or on their own in initial position as part of the clause, e.g.:

Er ist unzuverlässig. **Zum Beispiel**, er kommt immer spät *or* **Zum Beispiel** kommt er immer spät.

Words and phrases often used in this way are:

zum Beispiel	<i>for instance</i>	natürlich	<i>of course</i>
erstens, zweitens, etc.	<i>first, secondly, etc.</i>	offen gesagt	<i>to be frank</i>

(iii) A few adverbs and particles can be used together with another element in initial position, i.e.:

Am Ende **freilich** ist etwas Unerwartetes *To be sure at the end something new*

und etwas Neues da (<i>Borst</i>)	<i>and unexpected is there</i>
Der Buchfink jedoch ist nur in den ersten Lebensmonaten lernfähig (NZZ)	Chaffinches, on the other hand, are only able to learn in the first months of their life
Selbst in den Chroniken der Städter schließlich hat sich die Stadt als revolutionäre Neuheit in die Feudalwelt gestellt (<i>Borst</i>)	<i>After all, even in the chronicles of the burghers the city appears as a revolutionary innovation in feudal society</i>

The following adverbs and particles can be used in this way:

allerdings	<i>to be sure, admittedly</i>	jedenfalls	<i>at any rate</i>
also	<i>thus</i>	jedoch	<i>however</i>
freilich	<i>to be sure, admittedly</i>	wenigstens	<i>at least</i>
höchstens	<i>at most</i>	sozusagen	<i>so to speak</i>
immerhin	<i>all the same</i>	übrigens	<i>incidentally</i>

Alternatively, these can occur on their own in initial position in the usual way, e.g. **Freilich** ist am Ende etwas Unerwartetes und etwas Neues da. In practice, this is probably more frequent.

The function of these adverbs is like that of a coordinating conjunction in such constructions, and the conjunctions **aber** and **doch** have a similar flexibility in their positioning, see 17.1.1c.

(iv) Some types of subordinate clause are seen as separate from the main clause and are followed by another element before the finite verb, in particular:

- a *was* -clause which relates to the following clause as a whole:

Was so wichtig ist , das Buch verkauft sich gut	<i>What is so important, the book is selling well</i>
--	---

- concessive clauses of the ‘whatever’ type (see 17.6.2):

Es mag noch so kalt sein, die Post muss ausgetragen werden

Wer er auch ist, ich kann nichts für ihn tun

Wie schnell er auch lief, der Polizist holte ihn ein

(v) Two (or more) elements of the same kind can occur together in initial position if they complement or extend one another, being considered, in effect, as a single element. This is very common with adverbials of time and place, e.g.:

Gestern um zwei Uhr wurde mein Mann operiert

Auf dem alten Marktplatz in der Marburger Stadtmitte findet diese Woche ein Fest statt

Gestern Abend in Leipzig fand eine große Demonstration statt

(vi) A highlighted element can occur in isolation from the clause and dislocated from it. It is usually picked up by a pronoun or the like in initial position in the clause proper, e.g.:

Nach Kanada auswandern, das haben sie ja immer gewollt

Die Gudrun, der traue ich ja alles zu

Der Nachbar, der hat uns ja immer davon abhalten wollen

Als ich davon hörte, da war es schon zu spät

Mit Andreas, da wird es bald Ärger geben

Alternatively, the highlighted element can be placed after the clause, with a pronoun within the clause referring forward to it, e.g. ***Der** traue ich doch alles zu, **der Gudrun***. These constructions are typical of everyday speech and are rarely encountered in formal writing.

19.2.2 The initial element functions as the topic of the clause

The TOPIC is the element in a sentence which we mention first to say something more about it:

Der Kranke hat die ganze Nacht nicht geschlafen

(Information is being given about the patient)

In Frankfurt findet jedes Jahr die internationale Buchmesse statt

(We are being told what happens in Frankfurt)

In diesem Zimmer kannst du dich nicht richtig konzentrieren

(We are given information about this room)

In zwei Tagen wird die Reparatur fertig sein

(We are informed about what will be happening in two days)

The topic, in initial position, functions as a starting point for the clause. It comes first because the speaker (or writer) wants to give the listener (or reader) some new information about it.

The following general observations apply to the topic in a German main clause statement:

(a) The element in initial position is often known or familiar to both speaker and listener

A sentence often starts off with something which is known, and new information is given about it later in the sentence. This is shown by the examples above and the following:

Trotz des Poststreiks ist der Brief rechtzeitig angekommen

(You knew about the postal strike, but it's news to you that the letter still got there on time)

An den meisten deutschen Gymnasien ist Englisch die erste Fremdsprache

(You know about German schools but this is something you didn't know about the curriculum)

It is because a clause often begins with an element which is familiar to both speaker and listener that time adverbials are so common in initial position.

(b) The initial element often refers back to something just mentioned

Very often we want to pick up something which has just been referred to and give further information about it. The initial element often takes up a preceding word or phrase in continuous texts or dialogue:

Wir haben ihn im Garten gesucht, aber **im Garten** war niemand zu sehen

Ich sehe ihn oft. **Seinen Bruder** aber sehe ich jetzt recht selten

Ich war drei Wochen auf Sylt. – **Darum** siehst du auch so gut aus.

The answer to a question often repeats an element in the question in initial position and gives the answer later in the clause. Compare:

Was ist gegen Kriegsende
geschehen?

Wann wurden diese Städte
zerstört?

– **Gegen Kriegsende** wurden viele Städte
zerstört

– **Diese Städte** wurden gegen Kriegsende
zerstört

(c) The initial element is usually not the main piece of new information

Most main clauses begin with something familiar and the new information appears later. The following sentences sound odd because they start off with an important piece of new information:

?? **In einem kleinen Dorf** in Böhmen ist Stifter im Jahre 1805 geboren

?? **Ein neues Schloss** kaufte dieser Mann gestern

?? **Scharlachrot** ist ihr neues Kleid

These examples show that it is not true that ‘any’ element can be placed first ‘for emphasis’. The first element must be a suitable topic or starting point for the sentence. The strongest emphasis is actually normally on the most important piece of new information which appears later in the clause, see 19.3.

(d) The subject may sometimes not be suitable for initial position

As shown in 19.2.1b, the subject is often a natural choice to be the topic of a sentence. However, if the subject involves new information, it is usually more natural to begin with another element which is known and delay the subject until later in the clause:

Vor deiner Tür steht doch **ein neues Auto** *But there's a new car by your front door*

(With strong emphasis on the surprise at seeing the new car)

Zwei Tage darauf wurde gegen die Streikenden *Two days later the military was deployed*

Militär eingesetzt (*Brecht*) *against the strikers*

(*Militär* is the crucial new information; it would sound odd to begin the sentence with it)

It is unusual for a sentence to begin with an indefinite noun, as they normally involve new pieces of information. For this reason, the subject rarely occurs in initial position with verbs of happening, since the event is usually the main new information (see also 19.4.2c), e.g.:

Gestern ereignete sich **ein schwerer Unfall** in der Mariahilfer Straße

A 'dummy subject' *es* (see 3.6.2d) is often used to move the subject later in the sentence and give it heavier emphasis as important new information, e.g.:

Es kamen viele Gäste	<i>There were many guests</i>
Es möchte Sie jemand am Telefon sprechen	<i>There's somebody who wants to speak to you on the telephone</i>

As these examples show, the same effect can be achieved in English by using a construction with *there* (see also 19.2.3d).

(e) Changing the topic of the sentence

The emphasis in a sentence can be altered by changing the element in initial position. What we choose to place in first position depends on how we want to

present the information and what we assume the listener already knows. If we say:

Das Konzert findet heute Abend im Rathaus statt

we assume the listener knows that there is a concert on, and we are telling them where it is. On the other hand, if we say:

Heute Abend findet ein Konzert im Rathaus statt

we are telling the listener what's happening tonight. We are assuming that they don't know that there's a concert on in the town hall, and we are giving them this information. We can begin with *Heute Abend*, because that is information which the speaker and the listener share. Finally, if we say:

Im Rathaus findet heute Abend ein Konzert statt

we are telling the listener something about the town hall, i.e. that there's a concert on there tonight.

19.2.3 Topics in German and English

The flexibility of German in being able to choose which element to make the topic of a sentence is not shared by English, because the order SUBJECT + VERB at the start of a sentence is fixed.

If we want to make something other than the subject of the verb the topic of a sentence in English, we often have to use more complex constructions than are needed in German, and we explain here some typical English equivalents for these German constructions.

(a) Cleft sentences

If we want to bring an element other than the subject into first position in English, we often put it in a clause of its own with 'it' and the verb 'be', e.g. *It*

was Angela (who) I gave the book to. These are called CLEFT SENTENCE constructions. They are not needed in German, where the topic can simply be shifted into initial position before the verb:

Erst gestern habe ich es ihr gesagt *It was only yesterday that I told her*

Dort habe ich sie getroffen *It was there that I met her*

Weil sie oft schwimmt, ist sie fit *It's because she swims a lot that she's fit*

Was man sagt, zählt *It's what you say that counts*

There are many variants of this construction, all with simpler equivalents in German:

Dieses Auto da muss ich kaufen	<i>That's the car I've got to buy</i>
Dort/Hier wohnt sie	<i>That/This is where she lives</i>
Das meine ich (auch)	<i>That's what I mean</i>
So macht man das	<i>That's the way to do it</i>
Dann ist es passiert	<i>That's when it happened</i>
Dem gehört es	<i>That's whose it is</i>
Im Frühjahr ist es hier am schönsten	<i>Spring is when it's loveliest here</i>
Zu diesem Schluss gelangt Haas in ihrer neusten Arbeit	<i>This is the conclusion reached by Haas in her most recent work</i>

Cleft sentences tend only to be used in German to emphasize the subject of the sentence, e.g.:

Er war es, der mich davon abhielt *It was him who stopped me doing it*

(see also 3.6.2c). In other cases they typically sound clumsy in German and are best avoided.

(b) English passives for German actives

Passive constructions are often used in English to shift the object of the verb to initial position (as the subject of the verb) and function as its topic. Although passives are not unusual in German, a construction using the active voice, with

the object in initial position, is often preferred.

Diesen Bestseller hat die schwedische Autorin während eines langen Aufenthaltes in den USA geschrieben	<i>This bestseller was written by the Swedish writer during a long stay in the USA</i>
Meinem Vater hat der Chef sehr freundlich gratuliert	My father was congratulated by the boss in a very kindly way
Auf diese Worte müssen nun Taten folgen (Zeit)	<i>These words must now be followed by deeds</i>

(c) English constructions with ‘have’ and a participle

This construction brings the relevant element to the beginning of the sentence by making it the subject of ‘have’. There is nothing like this in German, and the element in question is simply placed first:

In diesem Buch fehlen zwanzig Seiten	<i>This book has (got) twenty pages missing</i>
In diesem Wald haben voriges Jahr viele Nachtigallen genistet	This wood had a lot of nightingales nesting in it last year
Ihm wurde eine Golduhr gestohlen	He had a gold watch stolen
Ihnen wurden die Fenster eingeworfen	<i>They had their windows smashed</i>

(d) English constructions with ‘there’

If the subject is the main piece of new information and needs to come later in the sentence for emphasis, English often shifts it from the position before the verb by using a construction with *there*. In German this can be achieved by bringing another element into initial position, typically a time phrase, or a phrase mentioning a place known to both speaker and listener:

Gestern hat es hier wenig geregnet	<i>There wasn't much rain here yesterday</i>
Vor zwanzig Jahren waren hier viele Zechen	There were a lot of coal-mines here twenty years ago

Da ist doch niemand	But there's nobody there
Im Cineplex laufen diese Woche zwei gute Filme	There are two good films on in the Cineplex this week
Draußen im Regen stand ein alter Herr	<i>There was an old man standing outside in the rain</i>

For more similar examples see 19.2.2d.

19.3 The order of other elements in the sentence

Most elements in a clause come within the VERBAL BRACKET explained in 19.1.2 and shown in [Table 19.4](#). The **relative order of the elements** inside this bracket is **the same for all clause types**, i.e. main clause statements, questions, commands and subordinate clauses, as illustrated in [Table 19.8](#):

[Table 19.8](#) Word order within the verbal bracket

	Initial position	Bracket ¹ [	Other elements	Bracket ²]
Main clause			ihn heute zufällig in der	
Question	Sie	hat	Stadt	gesehen
Subordinate clause	...,	Hat	sie ihn heute zufällig in der	gesehen?
		weil	Stadt	gesehen
			sie ihn heute zufällig in der	hat
			Stadt	

This relative order is determined by two basic principles:

- Elements which are more heavily stressed and convey important new information tend to follow elements which are less stressed.

The elements inside the verbal bracket are usually put in order of increasing importance, passing from unstressed elements like pronouns to those elements which represent the main new information and are given most emphasis. The element nearest the end of the bracket is typically the most important piece of

new information and typically carries the heaviest stress.

- Elements which are more closely linked to the verb tend to come after elements with a less strong link.

Many verb complements usually appear immediately before the final part of the verbal bracket. Similarly, direct objects, if they are nouns, normally come after the indirect objects, whose link with the verb is less 'direct'.

Following these general principles, the elements within the verbal bracket tend to occur in the order given in [Table 19.9](#). This order reflects general guidelines for the English-speaking learner, and it should not be taken to represent rigid rules of German word order. However, following these guidelines will almost always produce an acceptable German sentence, although they can be varied in certain ways for reasons of emphasis. Details on the position of each of the groups of elements are outlined in sections 19.4 to 19.8.

However, English-speaking learners need to be aware of the effect, in terms of emphasis and presentation, of changing the position of elements in a sentence. It is quite possible to end up saying something rather different to what you intend.

[Table 19.9](#) Basic order of the elements in a German sentence

	Topic	Bracket' [	Pronouns N A D	Noun subject	Dative noun object	Most adverbials	Accusative noun object	Manner adverbials	Complements	Bracket']
Main clause	Heute Jan Wir	hat soll wurden	ihr	mein Freund	dem Chef	heimlich jetzt nachher	eine Mail den Bericht	höflich	daran	geschickt bringen erinnert
Question/ command		Hat Will Geben	sie es ihm er Ihnen Sie mir			denn trotzdem sofort	den Weg das Geld	richtig		erklärt? zeigen? zurück!
Subordinate clause		..., weil ..., da ..., dass	sie	der alte Herr meine Tante	dem Mann	meistens	den Brief	vorsichtig schnell	für seine Hilfe in die Tasche	gedankt hat fährt stecken wollte

[19.4 The order of noun and pronoun subject and objects](#)

19.4.1 The position of pronouns

(a) Pronouns are usually the first elements in the verbal bracket

Pronouns refer to persons and things already mentioned, or well known to the speaker and listener. They are typically unstressed and for this reason occupy the least prominent position within the verbal bracket, following immediately after the finite verb in a main clause, question or command, or after the conjunction in a subordinate clause:

Gestern hat **ihn** mein Mann in der Stadt gesehen

Hat **ihn** dein Mann gestern in der Stadt gesehen?

Da **ihn** mein Mann gestern in der Stadt gesehen hat, ...

Dann hat **es** mein Bruder meinem Vater gegeben

Dann hat **mir** mein Bruder seinen Handy gegeben

(b) Pronouns can be placed before or after a noun subject

This is the only exception to the rule given in (a) above. It means that the following would be commonly used alternatives to the first three examples there:

Gestern hat mein Mann **ihn** in der Stadt gesehen

Hat dein Mann **ihn** gestern in der Stadt gesehen?

Da dein Mann **ihn** gestern in der Stadt gesehen hat, ...

In practice it is normal for a pronoun to follow a noun subject if the endings of the noun do not show nominative and accusative case clearly, in order to avoid ambiguity:

Gestern hat meine Mutter sie in der Stadt gesehen	<i>My mother saw her in town yesterday</i>
Da das Mädchen sie in der Stadt gesehen hat, ...	<i>As the girl saw her in town ...</i>

(*Da sie das Mädchen in der Stadt gesehen hat* would normally be taken to mean ‘As **she** has seen the girl in town’)

If there are two pronoun objects, it is more usual for them to follow a noun subject, e.g.:

Weil der Lehrer **es ihnen** gezeigt hat, ... *Because the teacher showed it to them, ...*

Nevertheless, other orders are quite possible, e.g.:

Weil **es** der Lehrer **ihnen** gezeigt hat, ...

Weil **es ihnen** der Lehrer gezeigt hat, ...

(c) Pronouns come in the order nominative + accusative + dative

Da sie dich ihm nicht vorstellen wollte, ...	<i>As she didn't want to introduce you to him ...</i>
Hast du es uns nicht schon gesagt?	<i>Haven't you already told us that?</i>
Gestern hat er sie ihr gegeben	He gave them to her yesterday
Heute will sie ihm helfen	She's going to help him today
Hanna hat es mir gezeigt	<i>Hanna showed it to me</i>

This order is relatively fixed. The only common variation on it is that the pronoun **es**, in the reduced form **'s**, often follows a dative pronoun in colloquial speech, e.g. *Heinz hat mir's gezeigt*.

(d) The reflexive pronoun *sich*

sich has the same position as other accusative or dative pronouns and normally comes immediately after the finite verb or the conjunction (and after a pronoun in the nominative, if there is one):

Gestern hat **sich** der Deutsche über das Essen beschwert

Gestern hat **sich** jemand darüber beschwert

Gestern hat er **sich** darüber beschwert

Er hatte es **sich** (*dat. !*) so vorgestellt

Er hat **sich** (*acc. !*) mir vorgestellt

However, it is occasionally placed after a noun subject, e.g. *Gestern hat der Deutsche **sich** über das Essen beschwert*, and, very occasionally, it is placed even later in the clause, e.g. *Gestern hat der Deutsche über das Essen **sich** beschwert*. In general, this is only possible with ‘true’ reflexive verbs used with an accusative reflexive, see 16.3.5.

(e) Personal pronouns precede other pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns such as **der**, **das**, **dieser**, etc. (see 5.1) come after personal pronouns like *er*, *dir*, *Ihnen*, *ihm*, etc. (and *man*), irrespective of case:

Wollen Sie **die** gleich mitnehmen? *Do you want to take those away with you now?*

Hat **ihn** **dieser** denn nicht erkannt? *Didn't that person recognize him, then?*

Eben hat sie **mir** **das** gezeigt *She's just shown me that*

19.4.2 The position of noun subject and objects

(a) The noun subject and objects usually have the order nominative + dative + accusative

This group of elements includes not only noun phrases in the nominative, accusative or dative case, but also indefinite pronouns such as *etwas*, *jemand*, *niemand*, *nichts*. As [Table 19.9](#) shows, they usually follow personal and demonstrative pronouns (but see 19.4.1(b) for exceptions), and precede other verb complements. Examples:

Gestern hat **jemand** **meinem** Vater **eine** Kettensäge geliehen

Warum hat **Manfred** **seiner** Freundin **nichts** gebracht?

Ich weiß, dass **mein** Freund **seiner** Tochter **diese** Bitte nicht verweigern konnte

Heute hat **der Chef den Mitarbeitern** für ihre Mühe gedankt

Variations on this order usually involve special circumstances of some kind, as explained in the remainder of this section. The position of adverbials in relation to these elements is explained in 19.5.

(b) The dative object sometimes follows the accusative object

(i) If the dative object refers to a person, this order indicates it is much more important in context. This possibility is not often used and gives very strong emphasis to the dative object:

Er hat sein ganzes Vermögen seinem Neffen in Kanada vermacht	<i>He left his whole fortune to his nephew in Canada</i>
---	--

(We already know about the fortune, what is surprising is who he left it to and *Neffen* is heavily stressed to indicate this)

Er stellte seinen Neffen (auch) dem Professor vor	<i>He introduced his nephew to the professor (, too)</i>
--	--

(**Who** the nephew was introduced to is the important fact. Compare the sentence *Er stellte dem Professor seinen Neffen vor*. Adding *auch* highlights even more strongly the importance of who he was introduced to)

als mein Vater diese merkwürdige Geschichte einem ihm völlig unbekannten Herrn erzählte	<i>when my father told this remarkable story to a gentleman whom he didn't know at all</i>
--	--

(The dative object is indefinite and thus previously unknown to the listener. It is more newsworthy and significant in context than 'this story', which must have been mentioned before)

(ii) If both accusative and dative objects refer to things, the more important of them in context is placed second:

dass er uns nicht alle zwingt, unsere höheren Zwecke seinem Interesse zu unterwerfen (<i>Wolf</i>)	<i>that he's not forcing us all to subject our higher aims to his personal interest</i>
---	---

Er hat sein Glück **seiner Karriere** geopfert *He sacrificed his happiness to his career*

(Compare the very different emphasis in: *Er hat seiner Karriere sein ganzes Glück geopfert*)

(iii) A dative object referring to a thing usually follows an accusative object referring to a person. It is rarely possible for the dative object to come first in such contexts:

Sie überantworteten den Verbrecher **der Justiz**
Sie haben den armen Jungen **der Lächerlichkeit**
preisgegeben

*They delivered up the criminal
to justice*
*They exposed the poor boy to
ridicule*

(c) The noun subject can follow an accusative and/or a dative object

If it is the major piece of new information it is possible for the noun subject to follow the object (or other complements). It is then emphasized very strongly, and in practice the subject in such contexts is most often a noun with an indefinite article or no article, or an indefinite pronoun (see also 19.2.2d):

Glücklicherweise wartet nun in Wien an jeder Ecke ein Kaffeehaus (<i>Zweig</i>)	<i>Luckily there is a coffee house waiting for you on every corner in Vienna</i>
Nun begrüßte den Dirigenten und den Virtuosens lautes Händeklatschen (<i>Kapp</i>)	Now the conductor and the virtuoso were met with loud applause
Gestern hat meinen Bruder Gott sei dank niemand gestört	Thank goodness nobody disturbed my brother yesterday
Er wusste, dass dieser Gruppe etwas Unangenehmes bevorstand	<i>He knew that something unpleasant was in store for this group</i>

Occasionally a subject with a definite article is placed late in the clause if the speaker or writer wants to give it particular emphasis:

Die Tatsache, dass der EU unausweichlich das Geld ausgeht	<i>The fact that the EU's money will inevitably run out</i>
---	---

The late position of an indefinite subject is almost regular with verbs of happening and the like, and it is also frequent in passive sentences:

Er wusste, dass seinem Chef eine große Ehre zuteil geworden war	<i>He knew that a great honour had been bestowed on his boss</i>
Zum Glück ist meinem Bruder da nichts passiert	<i>Luckily nothing happened to my brother</i>
Deshalb können den Asylbewerbern keine Personalausweise ausgestellt werden	<i>For this reason no identity cards can be issued to the asylum-seekers</i>

19.5 The place and order of adverbials

An adverbial can be a single word (e.g. *trotzdem, heute*), or a phrase with or without a preposition (e.g. *den ganzen Tag, mit großer Mühe*). This difference in form has no effect on word order. The classification of adverbs in [Chapter 7](#) applies equally to all adverbials.

The placing of adverbials is more flexible than that of any other element in the sentence. This reflects their general freedom of occurrence as elements optionally added to give additional information, see 16.1.4. This section deals first with the placing of adverbials in relation to other elements (chiefly the noun subject and objects), and then explains the ordering of adverbials where more than one is present.

19.5.1 The position of adverbials and the noun subject and objects

As shown in [Table 19.9](#), adverbials typically come **after the noun subject and the dative object**, but **before the accusative object**. However, the relative position of adverbials and noun subjects and objects depends very much on their

relative importance in the clause. Specifically, that element appears later in the clause which the speaker wants to stress most strongly or which conveys the most important new information.

(a) Unstressed adverbials can sometimes precede the noun subject and/or the dative object

This applies in particular to single words, in particular adverbs of attitude and modal particles, e.g. *bestimmt*, *sicher*, *vielleicht*, etc. Unstressed short adverbs of time and place like *da*, *dort*, *hier*, *gestern*, *heute*, *morgen*, *dann*, *damals*, *daher* also often occur early in the clause, immediately after the personal pronouns:

Sie wird wohl gleich ihrer Freundin simsen	<i>She'll probably text her friend straightaway</i>
Ich weiß, dass sie es sicher meinem Vater empfehlen wird	I know she'll be sure to recommend it to my father
Sie ist heute ihrem Freund aus Bonn begegnet	She met her friend from Bonn today
Hat sie schon damals ihrem Opa die ganze Geschichte erzählt?	<i>Did she tell her grandad the whole story at that time?</i>

In most of the above contexts the adverb could equally well follow the noun subject or objects, and it would then be more strongly emphasized. Compare *Hat sie ihrem Opa **schon damals** die ganze Geschichte erzählt?* However, such permutation is not possible in contexts where the noun subject or object is a vital piece of new information (especially if it is indefinite) and needs to be placed where it carries most stress:

Das hat bisher keiner gemerkt	<i>Nobody's noticed it up to now</i>
Da war doch niemand	Nobody was there, though
Ich bin dort einem Freund von deinem Bruder begegnet	<i>I ran into a friend of your brother's there</i>

A sentence like *Da war niemand doch* sounds very odd.

(b) The order of adverbials and noun objects depends on emphasis

i.e. how important they are in the context of the whole clause or sentence. The element which is being presented as more important comes later. Compare the following:

Er hat diese neuen Wagen **im Sommer** gekauft

(The stress is on **when** he bought the new car)

Er hat im Sommer **diesen neuen Wagen** gekauft

(The emphasis is on **what** he bought)

Sie haben Fußball **im Park** gespielt

(This tells us **where** they were playing football)

Sie haben im Park **Fußball** gespielt

(This tells us **what** they were playing in the park)

Das hat **gestern** ihr Kollege meinem Verlobten erzählt

(**Who** was told is the point at issue)

Das hat ihr Kollege **gestern** meinem Verlobten erzählt

(Who did the telling is seen as relatively unimportant)

Das hat ihr Kollege meinem Verlobten **gestern** erzählt

(Prominence is given to the time when the fiancé was told)

Although, from a grammatical point of view, there is flexibility in the order of these elements, in a particular context only one may be appropriate. Thus, in answer to the question *Wann hat er diesen neuen Wagen gekauft?* one would naturally use the first alternative above, as the second would sound strange.

(c) Adverbials of manner follow the noun objects

(and **all** other adverbials, see 19.6.2). This is because **how** something was done is typically the most important new information:

Meiner Meinung nach hat das Quartett das Stück viel zu schnell gespielt	<i>In my opinion the quartet played the piece much too fast</i>
Er warf den Ball sehr vorsichtig über den Gartenzaun	<i>He threw the ball very carefully over the garden fence</i>

19.5.2 The relative order of adverbials

If a clause contains more than one adverbial, they most often occur in the order:

attitude – time – reason – viewpoint – place – manner

(a) Adverbials of attitude

This group includes all the modal particles (see [Chapter 9](#)) and other adverbials which express some attitude on the part of the speaker towards what is being said (see 7.4.2), e.g. *angeblich, leider, vermutlich, zum Glück, zweifellos*, etc.:

Sie wollten **doch** vor zwei Uhr in Magdeburg sein

Er ist **vielleicht** schon am Montag abgereist

(b) Time adverbials

As explained in 7.3 these can indicate a **point in time** (e.g. *bald, voriges Jahr, am kommenden Sonntag*), **frequency** (e.g. *stündlich, jeden Tag*) or **duration** (e.g. *lange, seit Montag, ein ganzes Jahr*).

Sie ist **vor zwei Tagen** trotz des Sturms nach Reutte gewandert

Die Streikenden blieben **vier Stunden lang** vor dem Rathaus versammelt

If there is more than one time adverbial in a clause, they are usually placed in the order

point of time – duration – frequency

Within these categories **the general precedes the particular**, e.g. *jeden Tag um vier Uhr*.

(c) Adverbials of reason

i.e. adverbials expressing **circumstance** (e.g. *zu unserem Erstaunen*), **condition** (e.g. *gegebenenfalls*), **purpose** (e.g. *zur Durchsicht*) or **reason** (e.g. *wegen des Unfalls*), see 7.4.3. Passive agents introduced by *von* or *durch* (see 13.3) also occur in this position:

Sie hat den Brief **trotzdem** mit der Hand geschrieben

Der Brand wurde **von der freiwilligen Feuerwehr** schnell gelöscht

(d) Viewpoint adverbials

e.g. *finanziell* ‘from a financial point of view’, see 7.4.1b. Phrases with *mit* and *ohne* also occur in this position:

Polen ist in den letzten Jahren **wirtschaftlich** viel stärker geworden

Sie geht **mit Begeisterung** in die Tanzschule

(e) Place adverbials

See 7.1. Place adverbials must be distinguished from direction complements, see (h) below.

Die Band spielt aber morgen Abend **im Festsaal Kreuzberg**

Ich habe bis 18 Uhr **im Büro** gearbeitet

(f) Manner adverbials

i.e. those which indicate how an action is carried out, see 7.4.1. Adverbs of

manner are almost always the final element in the clause before any complements:

Sie ist heute mit ihrem Porsche **viel zu schnell** in die Kurve gefahren

Der Vorschlag wurde von den Anwesenden **einstimmig** angenommen

(g) The order of adverbials can be varied for emphasis

The relative order given above is only a guide to a ‘neutral’ order of the adverbs, assuming they all have roughly similar emphasis, and it is not a rigid rule.

As with the relative order of adverbials and the noun subject and objects, variation in the order of adverbials follows the general principle given in 19.3, i.e. an adverbial can be given more or less emphasis by being placed later or earlier in the clause. This often depends on what the speaker considers to be the main new information in context, which needs to be emphasized, e.g.:

Paula ist zum Glück **gestern** nicht zu schnell gefahren

Paula ist gestern **zum Glück** nicht zu schnell gefahren

(The adverbial in bold is made more prominent in each case by being placed later.)

Viele deutsche Städte wurden gegen Kriegsende **von den Alliierten** zerstört

Viele deutsche Städte wurden von den Alliierten **gegen Kriegsende** zerstört

(Placing the time adverbial after the *von* -phrase in the second example gives it particular prominence, possibly in reply to a question about when it happened.)

Sie hat sehr lange **dort** auf ihre Mutter gewartet

Sie hat dort **sehr lange** auf ihre Mutter gewartet

(Time adverbials usually precede place adverbials, but they can follow for emphasis.)

(h) The ‘time – manner – place’ rule

Many manuals of German for foreign learners have traditionally given a rule that

adverbials occur in the order time – manner – place. However, this can be quite misleading, since, as shown above, adverbials normally occur in the order **time – place – manner**:

Der junge Tenor hat gestern in Wien **hervorragend** gesungen

Die Kinder wollten heute auf der Wiese **ungestört** spielen

Nevertheless, many **elements indicating direction or place** can be seen to occur **after manner adverbials**, at the end of the verbal bracket and immediately before the final part of the verb. However, **these are complements of the verb – so-called locative complements – not adverbials**, see 16.8 and 19.8. **These complements follow all adverbials**, including those of manner:

Paula ist gestern viel zu schnell **in die Kurve** gefahren

Andreas wollte gestern mit seiner Freundin gemütlich **nach Freising** wandern

Sie hat die schöne Vase sehr vorsichtig **auf den Tisch** gestellt

Müllers wohnen einsam in einem großen Haus **im Wald**

Astrid lag erschöpft **auf der Couch**

Sie sind wegen des schlechten Wetters widerwillig **zu Hause** geblieben

The elements in bold in these examples are **direction complements** depending on **verbs of motion**, or **place complements** depending on **verbs of position**. As explained in 18.1.4, complements are more closely linked to the verb than adverbials, which simply give additional circumstantial information, and following the principles given in 19.3, they come at the end of the verbal bracket. The traditional ‘time – manner – place’ rule relies on the fact that, in practice, place and direction phrases tend to be more often complements than adverbials.

19.6 The position of *nicht*

Other negative elements like ***nie*** ‘never’ and ***kaum*** ‘hardly’, ‘scarcely’ occupy the same position in the clause as ***nicht***, and the following guidelines apply

equally to them.

The position of *nicht* depends on what it refers to. For example, in a sentence like *Anita hat den Roman nicht gelesen* it relates to the whole content of the sentence – Anita didn't carry out the action of reading the novel. However, we could say *Anita hat nicht den Roman gelesen*, meaning that she didn't read that particular novel (but possibly another one).

(a) If *nicht* relates to the whole content of the clause, it is placed near the end

i.e. just before any adverbs of manner and verb complements. Thus:

(i) *nicht* follows any noun objects

Er hat aber seine neue Stelle nicht erwähnt	<i>But he didn't mention his new job</i>
Er hat mir das Buch nicht gegeben	He didn't give me the book
Verkaufe die Bücher nicht !	Don't sell the books
Ich weiß, dass sie ihren Bruder gestern nicht gesehen hat	<i>I know she didn't see her brother yesterday</i>

However, *nicht* precedes any objects with no article which are part of a fixed verb phrase (see 19.7.2):

Sie hatte damals nicht Klavier gespielt	<i>She didn't play the piano then</i>
--	---------------------------------------

(ii) *nicht* follows all adverbials except those of manner

Sie haben sich seit langem nicht gesehen	<i>They haven't seen each other for a long time</i>
Den Turm sieht man von hier aus nicht	You can't see the tower from here
Ich wollte es ihr trotzdem nicht geben	I didn't want to give it to her all the same
Das ist mir in diesem Zusammenhang nicht aufgefallen	That didn't occur to me in that context
Wir sind wegen des Regens nicht nach Bernau gewandert	We didn't walk to Bernau because it

Sie haben gestern **nicht** gut gespielt
Ich weiß es **nicht** ausführlich

was raining
They didn't play well yesterday
I don't know it in detail

(iii) *nicht* precedes most verb complements, i.e. all complements of the verb **except** the subject and the direct or indirect objects:

Sie sind gestern **nicht** nach Mailand geflogen
Sie legte das Buch **nicht** auf den Tisch
Wir konnten uns **nicht** an diesen Vorfall
erinnern
Er blieb **nicht** in Rostock
Sie ist sicher **nicht** dumm
Sie war heute **nicht** im Büro

They didn't fly to Milan yesterday
She didn't put the book on the
table
We couldn't remember that
incident
He didn't stay in Rostock
She's certainly not stupid
She wasn't at the office today

However, *nicht* can follow prepositional objects or direction complements **if** it is relatively unstressed and the complement has to be emphasized. Compare:

Das kann ich doch **nicht von ihm** verlangen *I can't ask that of him*

Das kann ich doch **von ihm nicht** verlangen *I can't ask that of him*

(b) If *nicht* applies only to one particular element in the clause it precedes it

Sie hat mir **nicht** das Buch gegeben (not the
book, but something else)
Sie sind **nicht** am Freitag nach Kreta geflogen
(not Friday, but some other day)
Nicht mir hat er das Buch gegeben, sondern
meiner Schwester

She didn't give me the book
They didn't fly to Crete on
Friday
*It wasn't me he gave the book
to, it was my sister*

Compare the 'partial' negation in the first example above with 'global' negation of the whole clause, with *nicht* in its usual position: *Sie hat mir das Buch nicht gegeben* simply means 'She didn't give me the book'.

As an alternative, the stressed element can appear on its own in the initial position, with the *nicht* later in the clause, e.g. *Mir hat er das Buch nicht gegeben*. This is very common if the contrast is implicit, i.e. if there is no following clause or phrase with *sondern*.

Unstressed *nicht* is often used in this way in tentative or rhetorical questions or exclamations, e.g.:

Hast du **nicht** die Königin gesehen!?
War **nicht** dein Vater eigentlich etwas
enttäuscht!?
Was du **nicht** alles weißt!

Didn't you see the Queen!?
Wasn't your father really a bit
disappointed!?
Don't you know a lot!

19.7 The position of verb complements

With the exception of the subject and objects of the verb, which have their own position in the clause, the **complements of the verb come as far to the right as possible within the verbal bracket** (see [Table 19.9](#)). This position is relatively fixed, irrespective of emphasis, and only very exceptionally are complements found earlier in the clause.

19.7.1 Verb complements

The following complements occur in final position within the verbal bracket:

(a) prepositional objects

Nun wird er sich sicher **um seine**
beiden Kinder kümmern können
Sie hat in der Ankunftshalle lange **auf**
ihren Mann gewartet
Wir haben uns vorgestern lange und

Now he will certainly be able to look
after his two children
She waited for her husband in the
arrivals hall for a long time
We talked about it in detail for a long

ausführlich **darüber** unterhalten

time the day before yesterday

(b) the predicate complement of copular verbs

i.e. *sein, werden, bleiben, scheinen, heißen*, see 16.6. This complement may be a noun or an adjective:

Herbert war immerhin längere Zeit **der beste Schüler** in unserer Klasse

All the same, Herbert was top of our class for a long time

Sie wurde plötzlich **blass**

She suddenly turned pale

Dann scheinen mir diese Bedingungen jedoch **etwas hart**

In that case these conditions seem rather hard to me, though

(c) genitive objects

weil der Verletzte dringend **eines Arztes** bedurfte

because the injured man urgently needed a doctor

(d) locative (i.e. direction) complements with verbs of motion

Warum hat Peter den Stein plötzlich **in den Bach** geworfen?

Why did Peter suddenly throw the stone into the stream?

Sie ist mit ihrem Porsche zu schnell **in die Kurve** gefahren

She took the bend too fast in her Porsche

Wir möchten nächste Woche **nach Emden zu meinen Eltern** fahren

We want to go to my parents' in Emden next week

(e) locative (i.e. place) complements with verbs of position

Er befand sich plötzlich **in einem dunklen Saal**

He suddenly found himself in a dark room

Er wollte unter keinen Umständen **in**

He didn't want to remain in Duisburg

Duisburg bleiben
Sie haben lange **in dieser Hütte**
gewohnt

under any circumstances
They lived in that hut for a long time

19.7.2 The noun portion of phrasal verbs

Extended verb phrases can consist of a noun (often an infinitive or other verbal noun) used in a set phrase with a verb, e.g.:

Abstand halten Abschied nehmen Angst haben ins Rollen geraten

These are a rather special type of complement, as they are very closely linked to the verb in a way that makes them similar to separable prefixes. They are always placed at the end of the verbal bracket, and they could even be considered as forming part of the bracket rather than as separate elements within the clause.

Er hat sie durch seine Unvorsichtigkeit in die größte Gefahr gebracht	<i>He brought her into very great danger through his carelessness</i>
Ich habe ihr alle meine Bücher zur Verfügung gestellt	<i>I put all my books at her disposal</i>
Gestern hat uns der Minister von seinem Entschluss in Kenntnis gesetzt	<i>The Minister informed us of his decision yesterday</i>
Sein Chef hat ihn vorige Woche sehr unter Druck gesetzt	<i>His boss put him under a lot of pressure last week</i>
Ich merkte, wie der Wagen langsam ins Rollen kam	<i>I noticed the car slowly starting to roll forwards</i>

In subordinate clauses, these phrases can come after the auxiliary verb and thus be part of the final verbal bracket, e.g. *Ich habe keine Ahnung, wie der Wagen hätte ins Rollen kommen können* or *Die Zeit scheint vorbei, da man die eigenen Vorurteile hätte über Bord werfen können* (*Presse*) (see also 19.1.3b).

19.8 Elements following the final verbal bracket: the *Nachfeld*

The last element in a German clause is normally the final part of the verb. However, there are some contexts where it is usual or possible to place an element after this.

This construction is known as *Ausklammerung* in German, and it is becoming increasingly frequent, even in formal writing. This section explains where it is preferable or acceptable in modern German.

19.8.1 Subordinate and infinitive clauses

(a) Subordinate clauses are not normally enclosed within the verbal bracket

Sentences with clauses enclosed within one another and a cluster of verbs at the end (called *Schachtelsätze*, because they are like sets of boxes inside each other) can be cumbersome and are best avoided. Taken to extremes they can be quite impenetrable, like the following example:

Das „Vorsicht-Glatteis“-Verkehrszeichen, das letzte Nacht, die Frostbildung, was für den Autofahrer, der etwas getrunken und ein Auto gefahren, das abgefahrene Reifen hat, hat, erhöhte Gefahren mit sich bringt, brachte, total beschädigt wurde, wird nicht mehr aufgestellt.

As a general rule it is preferable to complete one clause, with the final part of its verbal bracket, before starting another. In the following pair of sentences, the second alternative, though not ungrammatical, is nowadays regarded as clumsy:

Ich konnte den Gedanken nicht loswerden, **dass wir ihn betrogen hatten**

Ich konnte den Gedanken, **dass wir ihn betrogen hatten**, nicht loswerden

A relative clause, especially a restrictive one, can be separated from the noun it refers to in order to avoid enclosing it:

Und wie dürfte man eine Zeitung verbieten, **die sich wiederholt und nachhaltig für die Wahl der staatstragenden Partei eingesetzt hat** ? (*Spiegel*)

Enclosing the relative clause results in a clumsy sentence:

*Und wie dürfte man eine Zeitung, **die sich wiederholt und nachhaltig für die Wahl der staatstragenden Partei eingesetzt hat**, verbieten?*

(b) Infinitive clauses are not usually enclosed within the verbal bracket

In this way, the following are usual:

Sie hatten beschlossen **vor dem Rathaus zu warten**

Er hat versucht **sein Geschäft zu verkaufen**

rather than:

Sie hatten **vor dem Rathaus zu warten** beschlossen

Er hat **sein Geschäft zu verkaufen** versucht

However, enclosing infinitive clauses is obligatory in some constructions, notably with some ‘semi-auxiliary’ verbs. Details are given in 11.2.4.

19.8.2 Comparative phrases introduced by *als* or *wie*

These are frequently placed outside the verbal bracket, especially those with *wie*:

Gestern haben wir einen besseren Wein getrunken als diesen	<i>Yesterday we drank a better wine than this one</i>
Ich wusste, dass sie ebenso ärgerlich war wie ich	<i>I knew she was just as annoyed as me</i>

However, enclosing phrases like these within the verbal bracket is not unusual:

Die Volkstracht hat sich in Oberbayern stärker als anderswo in Deutschland erhalten (<i>Baedeker</i>)	<i>Local costumes have been retained in Upper Bavaria longer than elsewhere in Germany</i>
--	--

ein Mann, der **wie ein Italiener** aussah *a man who looked like an Italian*

Enclosure is especially frequent within longer clauses, especially in writing:

da die Orangen und Zitronen von den Kindern **wie Schneebälle** über die
Gartenmauern geworfen wurden (*Andres*)

19.8.3 Other elements

Other elements of the clause are sometimes placed after the verbal bracket. There are three main reasons for this:

- to give strong emphasis to the element placed last:

Du hebst das auf **bis nach dem Abendessen** (*Baum*)

- as an afterthought:

Ich habe sie doch heute gesehen **in der Stadt**

- In order not to overstretch the verbal bracket, e.g.:

Seitdem Rodrigue seine Chronik begonnen hatte, freute er sich darauf, sie zu beschließen **mit der Darstellung der Regierung dieses seines lieben Schülers und Beichtkinds**

The following elements are often placed outside the verbal bracket:

(a) Adverbials with the form of prepositional phrases

These are commonly excluded for the reasons given above:

Hallo, ich rufe an **aus London** (*Telecom advert*)

Vieles hatte Glum schon gesehen **auf seinem Weg von seiner Heimat bis über den Rhein** hinweg
(*Böll*)

In general, constructions like these are more typical of colloquial speech than formal writing. However, *Ausklammerung* is not uncommon in writing, especially if the prepositional phrase is relatively long, as in the second example above, or if a further clause (typically a relative clause) depends on the element excluded, e.g.:

Von hier aus konnte man noch wenig sehen **von der kleinen Stadt**, die am anderen Ufer im Nebel lag

(b) Prepositional objects

Prepositional objects are the only verb complement to be regularly and frequently excluded in standard German:

Er hätte das merken können **an den gelegentlichen Rückblicken und dem Arm**, der entspannt auf der freien Vorderlehne lag (*Johnson*)

Er darf sich entschädigt fühlen **für ganze Jahre Underdog-Dasein im Straßenverkehr** (*Zeit*)

Du solltest dich nicht zu sehr freuen **auf diese Entwicklung**

However, not all prepositional objects can be excluded in this way and sentences like *Ich habe vor dem Bahnhof gewartet auf meine Freundin* are unacceptable to many native speakers. No clear rules have yet been identified about the circumstances in which prepositional objects can or cannot be excluded.

(c) Other verb complements

i.e. the subject or the accusative and dative objects, or place and direction complements. These are not usually excluded in standard German, although very lengthy elements may occasionally be, e.g.:

Wir haben aus Steuergeldern gebaut **Wohnungen für nahezu zwanzigtausend Menschen**

Otherwise, such exclusions are restricted to informal registers, e.g. *Gestern habe ich gesehen Toms Onkel aus Dortmund*.

(d) Adverbs

Exclusion of simple adverbs is very common in colloquial speech, but avoided in formal writing:

Bei uns hat es Spätzle gegeben **heute**

Sie sollen leise reden **hier**

Ich bin nach Trier gefahren **deshalb**

Hat es euch gefallen **dort** ?

Word formation

We can distinguish in German between **simple words** (or ‘root words’) like *Kind*, *dort* and *schön*, which cannot be broken down, and **complex words** like *kindisch*, *dortig* and *Schönheit*, which are made up of more than one component and are derived from simple words in some way.

Knowing about German word formation (called ‘DERIVATION’), i.e. how these complex words are made up, is invaluable for extending the learner’s vocabulary. The importance of being able to recognize the meaning of a whole word from its parts, and identify patterns like *Dank* – *danken* – *dankbar* – *Dankbarkeit* – *Undankbarkeit* cannot be overestimated. Series of words like this are often more transparent in German than in English, as we can see when we compare this set to English *thanks* – *to thank* – *grateful* – *gratitude* – *ingratitude*.

This chapter explains the most frequent means of word formation in German:

- methods of **word formation** (section 20.1)
- the formation of **nouns** (section 20.2)
- the formation of **adjectives** (section 20.3)
- the formation of **verbs** (sections 20.4–20.7)
 - with **inseparable prefixes** (section 20.5)
 - with **separable prefixes** (section 20.6)
 - with **variable prefixes** (section 20.7)

- other means of **verb formation** (section 20.8)

20.1 Methods of word formation

20.1.1 Complex words are formed in three main ways

(a) by means of a prefix or suffix

In general, PREFIXES and SUFFIXES do not occur as words in their own right, but are only used with simple words to form other words, e.g.:

- **prefixes:**

die Sprache	→	die Ursprache	schön	→	unschön
stehen	→	bestehen	besser	→	verbessern

- **suffixes:**

gemein	→	die Gemein heit	bedeuten	→	die Bedeut ung
der Freund	→	freund lich	denken	→	denk bar
der Motor	→	motoris ieren	die Kontrolle	→	kontroll ieren

Prefixes are most often used to create nouns from nouns, adjectives from adjectives, or verbs from other verbs or from nouns and adjectives. Suffixes are most common to make nouns from adjectives or verbs or adjectives from nouns or verbs; they are seldom used to form verbs.

(b) by means of vowel changes

These vowel changes are often linked with particular suffixes, but they can occur on their own. The following vowel changes are used in word formation:

- ***Umlaut:***

der Arzt	→	die Ärztin	der Bart	→	bärtig
der Druck	→	drücken	scharf	→	schärfen

• **Ablaut**, i.e. vowel changes like those of the strong verbs, see 12.1.2. *Ablaut* in word formation is chiefly restricted to use with strong verb roots:

aufsteigen	→	der Aufstieg	werfen	→	der Wurf
beißen	→	bissig	schließen	→	schlüssig

These vowel changes, especially *Ablaut*, are usually no longer productive (see 20.1.2) in modern German.

(c) by forming compound words

In compounding, a new word is made up from two (or more) existing words:

der Staub + saugen	→	der Staubsauger	hell + blau	→	hellblau
der Rat + das Haus	→	das Rathaus	die Brust + schwimmen	→	brustschwimmen

Sometimes there is a linking sound between the two words, e.g.:

der Bauer + der Hof	der Bauer n hof
das Land + der Mann	der Land s mann

The ease with which compounds can be formed is a distinctive feature of German (and the source of the notorious long words), and the extensive use of compounds is typical of modern German, especially in technical registers.

20.1.2 Productive and unproductive word formation patterns

If new words are still being created by means of a particular pattern (e.g. by adding a particular prefix or suffix), that pattern is called **productive**. For example, the suffix *-bar* is commonly used to make adjectives from nouns (= English ‘-able’, ‘-ible’, see 20.3.1a), and new words in *-bar* are regularly found, like *machbar* ‘do-able’ or even from recent English loans like *downloadbar*.

On the other hand, many abstract nouns from adjectives are found with the

suffix - *e*, and *Umlaut* of the root vowel, see 20.2.1b, e.g.:

groß → die Größe gut → die Güte hoch → die Höhe lang → die Länge

However, no new nouns are created from adjectives in this way; the pattern is **unproductive**. Nevertheless, it is still important to know about it, because there are so many words in the language which have been formed with this pattern.

This chapter deals with all the common patterns of word formation in German, whether they are productive or unproductive.

20.2 The formation of nouns

20.2.1 Noun derivation by means of suffixes

The following suffixes are common, although not all of them are still fully productive. Many are associated with a particular gender, see 1.1.

(a) *-chen*, *-lein* (neuter)

These suffixes are very productive and used to form **diminutives from nouns**:

das Auge	→	das Äuglein	little eye	die Karte	→	das Kärtchen	little card
das Buch	→	das Büchlein	little book	die Stadt	→	das Städtchen	little town

The vowel of the stressed syllable usually has *Umlaut* if possible, although exceptions are common, especially with names, e.g. *Kurtchen*. *-chen* is commoner than *-lein*, which is mainly restricted to words ending in *-ch*, *-g* or *-ng*, and to archaic or poetic language. It was originally South German, but, in practice, colloquial South German speech now uses other forms from the local dialects to form diminutives, e.g. *-li* (Switzerland), *-(e)le* (Swabia), *-la* (Franconia), *-(er)l* (Austria and Bavaria).

In some cases, derivations with both *-chen* and *-lein* from the same noun are used

with a difference in meaning, e.g. *Fräulein* ‘girl’, *Frauchen* ‘mistress’ (e.g. of a dog).

In non-standard colloquial speech, *-chen* is sometimes added to plurals in *-er*, e.g. *Kinderchen*.

(b) *-e* (feminine)

(i) Nouns in *-e* from verbs denote an action or an instrument. The latter is still productive, especially in technical registers:

absagen	→	die Absage	<i>refusal</i>	bremsen	→	die Bremse	<i>brake</i>
pflegen	→	die Pflege	<i>care</i>	leuchten	→	die Leuchte	<i>light</i>

(ii) Nouns in *-e* from adjectives denote a quality. The vowel has *Umlaut* if possible. This pattern is no longer productive, having been replaced by *-heit* or *-(ig)keit* (see (e) below):

groß	→	die Größe	<i>size</i>	stark	→	die Stärke	<i>strength</i>
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(c) *-ei, -erei, -elei* (feminine)

These suffixes are productive and form **nouns from verbs or from other nouns**. The suffix *-ei* is always stressed, see 21.1.6b.

(i) Nouns in *-erei* from verbs are mainly pejorative, indicating a repeated, irritating action:

fragen	die Fragerei	<i>lots of annoying questions</i>
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The basis can be a whole phrase, e.g.:

Rekorde haschen → die Rekordhascherei *record hunting*

-ei is used in the same sense from verbs in *-eln* and *-ern*, e.g.:

lieben ~ die Liebel **ei** *flirtation*

- *ele i* and - *erei* also have pejorative meaning if used with a **noun base**:

Fremdwörter	die Fremdwört elei <i>using (too) many foreign words</i>
die Sklave	die Sklav erei <i>slavery</i>

(ii) Nouns in - *ei* from nouns (often a noun in - *er*) denote the place where something is done:

das Datum	die Dat ei (<i>computer</i>) <i>file</i> (i.e. where data are kept)
der Bäcker	die Bäcker ei <i>bakery</i>

(d) -*er*, -*ler*, -*ner* (masculine)

These productive suffixes form **nouns from verbs or nouns**. The root vowel occasionally has *Umlaut*:

(i) Most **nouns in - *er* from verbs** denote the **person who does something**, often a profession:

einbrechen	→	der Einbrecher <i>burglar</i>	schreiben	→	der Schreiber <i>writer</i>
lehren	→	der Lehrer <i>teacher</i>	betteln	→	der Bettler <i>beggar</i>

The base can be a whole phrase, e.g. *einen Auftrag geben* ~ *der Auftraggeb* **er** 'client', 'customer'.

New formations can also be formed from foreign, especially English roots, e.g. *der Blueser* (from *die Blues*) 'blues singer/fan'.

(ii) - *ler* (less commonly - *ner*) is used to derive nouns from other nouns to indicate the person who does something. Some are pejorative:

das Bühnenbild	→	der Bühnenbild ner <i>stage designer</i>	die Rente	→	der Rent ner <i>pensioner</i>
die Kunst	→	der Künst ler <i>artist</i>	der Sport	→	der Sport ler <i>sportsman</i>
der Profit	→	der Profit ler <i>profiteer</i>	die Wissenschaft	→	der Wissenschaft ler <i>scientist</i>

die Eisenbahn → der Eisenbahner
railway worker

bohren → der Bohrer *drill* empfangen → der Empfänger *receiver*

Staub saugen	der Staubsaug er <i>vacuum cleaner</i>
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Frankfurt	→	der Frankfurter	Österreich	→	der Österreicher
Hamburg	→	der Hamburger	Wien	→	der Wiener

Hannover → der Hannover**aner** Zürich → der Zür**cher**

These suffixes are used productively to form **abstract nouns from adjectives** denoting a quality:

bitter	→	die Bitter keit <i>bitterness</i>	heftig	→	die Heftig keit <i>violence</i>
gleich	→	die Gleich heit <i>similarity</i>	geschwind	→	die Geschwindig keit <i>speed</i>
eitel	→	die Eitel keit <i>vanity</i>	genau	→	die Genauig keit <i>precision</i>

(f) *-in* (feminine)

The productive suffix - *in* forms nouns denoting the **feminine** of persons and animals. The root vowel usually has *Umlaut*:

der Arzt	die Ärzt in <i>woman doctor</i>
der Fuchs	die Füchs in <i>vixen</i>
der Präsident	die Präsident in <i>female president</i>
der Rocker	die Rocker in <i>female rock singer</i>

If the base word ends in - *erer*, e.g. *der Herausforderer* ‘challenger’, the final -*er* is dropped before adding the suffix -*in*, e.g. *die Herausforderin*.

For the use of these feminine forms see 1.1.7b.

(g) -*ling* (masculine)

This productive suffix is used to form **nouns from verbs or adjectives**.

(i) Nouns in -*ling* from **verbs** denote **persons who are the object of the action**:

prüfen → der Prüfling *examinee* strafen → der Sträfling *prisoner*

(ii) Nouns in -*ling* from **adjectives** designate **persons possessing that quality**:

feige → der Feigling *coward* fremd → der Fremdling *stranger*

Similar formations denoting plants and animals are common, e.g. *der Grünling* ‘greenfinch’, *der Kohlweißling* ‘cabbage white (butterfly)’, but they are no longer productive.

(h) -*nis* (neuter or feminine)

Nouns in - *nis* are **abstract nouns from verbs or adjectives**. Those from verbs (which often have irregular forms or use the past participle as a base) often denote the result of the verbal action. The suffix is no longer productive:

erleben → das Erlebnis *experience*
 ersparen → das Ersparnis *savings*
 gestehe → das Geständnis *confession*

finster → die Finsternis *darkness*
 geheim → das Geheimnis *secret*
 wild → die Wildnis *wilderness*

(i) *-schaft* (feminine)

The productive use of this suffix is to form **nouns from other nouns** designating a **collective** or a **state**:

der Student	die Studenten schaft <i>student body</i>
der Freund	die Freund schaft <i>friendship</i>

Other derivational patterns with *-schaft*, i.e. from adjectives (e.g. *die Schwangerschaft* ‘pregnancy’) or from participles (e.g. *die Errungenschaft* ‘achievement’), are no longer productive.

(j) *-tum* (neuter)

- *tu m* is used productively with **nouns referring to persons to form nouns** denoting **institutions, collectives or characteristic features**:

der Beamte	→	das Beamtent um <i>civil servants</i>	der Papst	→	das Papst tum <i>papacy</i>
der Deutsche	→	das Deutscht um <i>Germanness</i>	das Volk	→	das Volkst um <i>national traditions</i>
der König	→	das Königt um <i>monarchy</i>			

(k) *-ung* (feminine)

This very productive suffix is used to form **nouns from verbs** referring to the **action of the verb**:

bedeuten <i>mean</i>	→	die Bedeut ung <i>meaning</i>	bilden <i>form</i>	→	die Bild ung <i>formation</i>
landen <i>land</i>	→	die Land ung <i>landing</i>	töten <i>kill</i>	→	die Töt ung <i>killing</i>

20.2.2 Noun derivation by means of prefixes

All these prefixes except *Ge-* are stressed, see 21.1.6c. The gender of nouns with prefixes is the same as that of the root noun, with the exception of those in *Ge-*, which are mostly neuter, see 1.1.2e.

(a) *Erz-* = ‘arch-’, ‘out and out’

der Bischof → der **Erz** bischof *archbishop*

der Gauner → der **Erz** gauner *out and out scoundrel*

(b) *Ge-*

Nouns in *Ge-* (often with the suffix *-e* in addition) can be formed from verbs or from other nouns:

(i) **Nouns in *Ge* - from verbs** denote a **repeated or protracted activity**. They often have a pejorative sense, like nouns in *-erei*, see 20.2.1c, to which those in *Ge-* are often an alternative:

laufen → das **Ge** laufe *running about, bustle* (esp. to no real purpose)

schwätzen → das **Ge** schwätz *idle talk, gossip*

(ii) **Nouns in *Ge* - from other nouns** are **collectives**. The root vowel has *Umlaut* if possible (and *-e-* changes to *-i-*):

der Ast → das **Ge** äst *branches* der Berg → das **Ge** birge *mountain range*

(c) *Grund-* = ‘basic’, ‘essential’

die Tendenz → die **Grund** tendenz *basic tendency*

(d) *Haupt-* = ‘main’

der Bahnhof → der **Haupt** bahnhof *main station*

(e) **Miss-** denotes an opposite or a negative

It sometimes has a pejorative sense:

der Brauch → der **Miss** brauch *misuse* der Erfolg → der **Miss** erfolg *failure*

Fehl - is now probably more productive than **Miss** - to express an opposite or a negative, e.g.:

die Einschätzung → die **Fehl** einschätzung *false estimation*

(f) **Mit-** = co-, etc.

der Arbeiter → der **Mit** arbeiter *colleague, collaborator*

der Reisende → der **Mit** reisende *fellow traveller*

(g) **Nicht-** = non-

der Raucher → der **Nicht** raucher *non-smoker*

(h) **Riesen-** has an augmentative sense

der Erfolg → der **Riesen** erfolg *enormous success*

Riesen- is particularly common in speech, and informal registers of German are rich in other augmentative prefixes, e.g. **Bomben** geschäft, **Heiden** lärm, **Höllen** durst, **Mords** apparat, **Spitzen** belastung, **Super** hit, **Teufels** kerl, **Top** manager, etc.

(i) **Rück-** occurs with many nouns related to verbs in *zurück-*

die Fahrt → die Rückfahrt *return journey* (cf. *zurückfahren*)

The full form *Zurück-* is usually kept with nouns in *-ung* from verbs, e.g. *zurückhalten* → *die Zurückhaltung*.

(j) *Un-* = opposite, abnormal

der Mensch → der Unmensch *inhuman person* die Summe → die Unsumme *vast sum*

die Ruhe → die Unruhe *unrest* das Wetter → das Unwetter *bad weather*

(k) *Ur-* = ‘original’

die Sprache → die Ursprache *original language*

20.2.3 Other methods of noun formation

(a) Many nouns are formed from verb roots without a suffix

These are almost all masculine, see 1.1.2a. This means of derivation is no longer productive, although German still has many words which have been formed this way. It is most common with strong verbs (which may themselves be prefixed), and the root vowel is often changed:

ausgehen	→	der Ausgang	<i>exit</i>	schließen	→	der Schluss	<i>close</i>
brechen	→	der Bruch	<i>break</i>	stechen	→	der Stich	<i>stab, sting</i>
ersetzen	→	der Ersatz	<i>replacement</i>	zurückfallen	→	der Rückfall	<i>relapse</i>

(b) Verb infinitives can be used as nouns

e.g. *das Aufstehen* ‘getting up’, *das Reiten* ‘riding’. These often correspond to English ‘ing’-forms used as nouns and refer to the action as such. They are all neuter and further information about them is given in 11.4.

(c) Adjectives and participles can be used as nouns

e.g. *der/die Fremde* ‘stranger’, *der/die Vorsitzende* ‘chair(person)’ (see 6.2 for further examples). Such nouns from adjectives often co-exist with derived nouns:

fremd → *der Fremde and der Fremdling*

einbrechen → *der Einbrechende and der Einbrecher*

In these cases the noun derived by means of a suffix has a more extended sense than the adjective used as a noun. Both *der Fremde* and *der Fremdling* mean ‘stranger’, but the latter is rather pejorative. *der Einbrecher* means, specifically, ‘burglar’, but *der Einbrechende* simply means ‘the person breaking in at present’ (who may not necessarily be a criminal).

20.2.4 Compound nouns

The ease with which compound nouns can be formed is a feature of German, and the use of compounds has increased significantly in recent years. In particular, while two-part compounds like *Krankenhaus* and *Schreibtisch* have always been common, there has been an extension in the use of compounds with three or more elements over the last hundred years, especially in technical and official language, e.g. *Fahrpreisermäßigung*, *Autobahnraststätte*, *Roggenvollkornbrot*. Even so, compounds with more than four elements, such as *Rindfleischetikettierungsüberwachung-saufgabenübertragungsgesetz* are (thankfully) still unusual.

Compound nouns usually take the gender of the last part, see 1.1.8a.

(a) Types of noun compound

Almost any part of speech can combine with a noun to form a compound, e.g.:

(i)	noun + noun	das Haar + die Bürste	die Haarbürste <i>hair brush</i>
(ii)	adjective + noun	edel + der Stein	der Edelstein <i>gem</i>

(iii)	numeral + noun	drei + das Rad	das Dreirad <i>tricycle</i>
(iv)	verb + noun	hören + der Saal	der Hörsaal <i>lecture theatre</i>
(v)	preposition + noun	unter + die Tasse	die Untertasse <i>saucer</i>
(vi)	adverb + noun	jetzt + die Zeit	die Jetztzeit <i>the present day</i>

(b) A linking element is inserted in many noun + noun compounds

e.g. *die Liebling s farbe*, *die Straße n ecke*. These linking elements (called **Fugenelemente** in German) occur in about a third of all compounds, and they are notoriously unpredictable. A few words form some compounds with a link and some without one, e.g. *der Lobgesang* **but** *die Lob es hymne*. Other words form some compounds with one link and others with a different one, e.g. *das Tag e buch* **but** *die Tag es zeitung*. Furthermore, Austrian and Swiss usage often differs from that in Germany, e.g. Austrian *der Zug s führer* for German *der Zugführer*. In practice, each compound needs to be learnt with its link. These linking elements depend on the **first** part of the compound, and the following are found:

(i) - *e* - occurs with a few nouns, especially those with a plural in - *e*. The root vowel often has *Umlaut* if the plural has *Umlaut*, e.g. *der Pferd e stall*, *der G ä ns e braten*.

(ii) - (*e*)*s* - (i.e. the ending of the genitive) occurs with many masculine and neuter nouns (and a few feminines), e.g. *die Wind es eile*, *das Kalb s leder*, *der Lieb es brief*.

(iii) - (*e*)*n* - is used with many feminine nouns, with 'weak' masculine nouns (see 1.3.2) and with adjectives used as nouns, e.g. *der Scheib en wischer*, *die Held en tat*.

(iv) - *er* - is found with some nouns which have a plural in -*er*. *Umlaut* is usually present if possible, e.g. *die Männ er stimme*, *die Rind er zucht*.

(c) Limitations on the formation of compound nouns

It seems easy to make up compound words in German, but there are restrictions on their formation which are not fully understood, and it is not possible to give clear rules. A few hints are given here for guidance, but it is good practice for foreign learners to be cautious in forming compounds which they have not actually seen or heard used.

In German compound nouns, the first element carries the main stress and defines the second. Thus, *Rathaus* is a type of *Haus* and *Tiefkühltruhe* is a kind of *Truhe*. A compound like *Blauhimmel* for 'blue sky', on the other hand, is not possible, because it is not a type of sky. We must say *der blaue Himmel*.

In particular, compounds like *Vatermitarbeiter* or *Ulmbesuch*, whose first element is an individual person or place, are odd because they are not 'types' of colleague or visit; a full phrase: *der Mitarbeiter meines Vaters* or *sein Besuch in Ulm* is preferred. However, under the influence of English, compounds like this are now becoming more widely used, although purists still consider them incorrect.

Adjective + noun compounds tend to be very restricted. In practice they always mean something rather different from when the relevant adjective is used as an epithet with the noun. Thus, *eine Großstadt* is more than *eine große Stadt*, and *ein Junggeselle* is not simply *ein junger Geselle*.

(d) Semi-compound suffixes

A few nouns are so widely used in modern German as the basis for compound nouns that they can be considered as suffixes rather than as distinct words in their own right. Words with these semi-suffixes are typical of official German. The most frequent are:

(i) - *gut*

Nouns in *-gut* express the set of material used in a process, or the totality of things expressed in the first element:

streuen *scatter, grit* (roads) → das Streugut *material for gritting roads*

der Gedanke *thought* → das Gedankengut *whole body of thought*

(ii) - *werk*

Nouns in *-werk* from nouns (often plural, and often denoting plants or materials) are typically collective, indicating the whole of something:

das Blatt *leaf* → das Blätterwerk *foliage*

der Zucker *sugar* → das Zuckerwerk *sweets, candies*

(iii) - *wesen*

Nouns in *-wesen* express the whole systematic collectivity of people and institutions involved in the first element:

die Gesundheit *health* → das Gesundheitswesen *health system*

die Schule *school* → das Schulwesen *school system*

(iv) - *zeug*

Nouns in *-zeug* express a set of things used in a particular activity:

nähen *sew* → das Nähzeug *sewing kit*

schlagen *hit* → das Schlagzeug *drum kit*

20.3 The formation of adjectives

20.3.1 Adjective derivation by means of suffixes

(a) *-bar*

This very productive suffix forms **adjectives from verbs** with the sense of English ‘-able’, ‘-ible’:

brauchen → brauch**bar** *usable*

essen → ess**bar** *edible*

Adjectives in *-bar* are a frequent alternative to passive constructions, see 13.4.8.

(b) *-(e)n, -ern*

These suffixes are formed from **nouns denoting a material**, and the adjective indicates that the qualified noun is made from that material. The form *-ern* is normally associated with *Umlaut*:

das Gold → golden *golden*

das Silber → sil**bern** *silver*

das Holz → hölz**ern** *wooden*

der Stahl → stäh**lern** *steel*

Note the difference between adjectives in *-(e)n* or *-ern* and those in *-ig* (see (d) below) from the same noun, e.g. *silbern* ‘(made of) silver’, *silbrig* ‘silvery’ (i.e. like silver).

(c) *-haft*

Adjectives formed from **nouns** with the suffix *-haft* indicate a **quality like the person or thing** denoted by the noun, e.g.:

der Greis → greisen**haft** *senile*

der Held → helden**haft** *heroic*

(d) *-ig*

-ig is a common and productive suffix, often associated with *Umlaut*. It is mainly used to form **adjectives from nouns**:

(i) with the idea of possessing what is denoted by the noun, e.g.:

das Haar → haar**ig** *hairy*

der Staub → staub**ig** *dusty*

(ii) indicating a **quality like the person or thing denoted by the noun**:

die Milch → milch**ig** *milky*

der Riese → ries**ig** *gigantic*

Adjectives in *-ig* can be formed from whole phrases: *blauäugig* ‘blue-eyed’, *heißblütig* ‘hot-blooded’.

(iii) indicating duration (from time expressions):

zwei Stunden → zweistünd **ig** *lasting two hours*

Note the difference between these adjectives in *-ig* (which express duration) and those in *-lich* (which express frequency), e.g. *zweistündlich* ‘every two hours’, see (f) below.

(iv) *-ig* forms **adjectives from adverbs**, e.g.:

dort	→	dortig	heute	→	heutig
ehemals	→	ehemalig	morgen	→	morgig
hier	→	hiesig	sonst	→	sonstig

(e) *-isch*

This is a productive suffix, often associated with *Umlaut*, used mainly to form adjectives from nouns:

(i) adjectives from proper names and geographical names:

England	→	englisch	English	Homer	→	homerisch	Homeric
Europa	→	europäisch	European	Sachsen	→	sächsisch	Saxon

(ii) adjectives which indicate a **quality like that of the person or thing** denoted by the noun. They are often pejorative:

der Held	→	heldisch	heroic	das Kind	→	kindisch	puerile
der Herr	→	herrisch	imperious	der Wähler	→	wählerisch	fastidious

Compare the pejorative *kindisch* with the neutral *kindlich* ‘childlike’.

(iii) adjectives from **nouns of foreign origin**. These adjectives are always stressed on the penultimate syllable, see 21.1.6d:

die Biologie	→ biologisch <i>biological</i>	die Musik	→ musikalisch <i>musical</i>
die Mode	→ modisch <i>fashionable</i>	der Nomade	→ nomadisch <i>nomadic</i>

(f) -lich

This is a common suffix with a wide range of functions. Adjectives formed with -lich often have *Umlaut*:

(i) Adjectives from nouns in -lich indicate a relationship to that person or thing, or indicate the possession of the quality denoted by it:

der Arzt	→ ärztlich <i>medical</i>	der Fürst	→ fürstlich <i>princely</i>
der Buchstabe	→ buchstäblich <i>literal</i>	der Preis	→ preislich <i>in respect of price</i>
der Feind	→ feindlich <i>hostile</i>	der Tod	→ tödlich <i>fatal, deadly</i>

This is the only use of -lich which is still productive in modern German.

(ii) Adjectives in -lich from time expressions denote **frequency**:

zwei Stunden → zweistündlich *every two hours*

For the difference between adjectives in -ig and -lich from time expressions, see (d) above.

(iii) Adjectives in -lich from verbs indicate **ability**:

bestechen	→ bestechlich <i>corruptible</i>	verkaufen	→ verkäuflich <i>saleable</i>
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This use of -lich is no longer productive, having been replaced by -bar, see (a) above.

(iv) Adjectives in -lich from other adjectives usually indicate a **lesser degree of the relevant quality**:

arm	→ ärmlich <i>shabby; humble</i>	krank	→ kränklich <i>sickly</i>
klein	→ kleinlich <i>petty</i>	rot	→ rötlich <i>reddish</i>

(g) -los

-los is used to form **adjectives from nouns** and **corresponds to English ‘-less’**:

die Hoffnung → hoffnungs**los** *hopeless*

die Wahl → wahl**los** *indiscriminate*

(h) -mäßig

This suffix is very productive, especially in formal registers, to derive **adjectives from nouns**:

(i) with the sense of ‘in accordance with’:

die Gewohnheit
der Plan

→ gewohnheits **mäßig** *habitual*

→ plan **mäßig** *according to plan*

-gemäß is an alternative to **-mäßig** in this sense, but it is less common, e.g. *plangemäß, ordnungsgemäß*.

(ii) with the sense of ‘in respect of something’, ‘pertaining to’:

der Instinkt
der Verkehr

→ instinkt **mäßig** *instinctive*

→ verkehrs **mäßig** *relating to traffic*

(iii) with the sense of ‘like someone or something’:

der Fürst
das Lehrbuch

→ fürsten **mäßig** *princely*

→ lehrbuch **mäßig** *like a textbook*

(i) -sam

This suffix is no longer productive. Adjectives in **-sam** have two main sources:

(i) from verbs (especially reflexive verbs), expressing a possibility or a tendency:

sich biegen

→ bieg **sam** *flexible*

sparen

→ spar **sam** *thrifty*

(ii) from **nouns**, indicating a quality:

die Furcht → furcht **sam** *timid* die Gewalt → gewalt **sam** *violent*

20.3.2 Adjective derivation by means of prefixes

These prefixes are **usually stressed** and form adjectives from other adjectives.

(a) *erz-*, *grund-*, *hoch-* have intensifying meaning

erz- is mainly used with a rather negative sense, whereas *grund-* and *hoch-* tend to be more positive. Both *erz-* and *grund-* are rather limited in use:

reaktionär → **erz** reaktionär *very reactionary*
ehrlich → **grund** ehrlich *thoroughly honest*
verschieden → **grund** verschieden *totally different*
begabt → **hoch** begabt *highly talented*
intelligent → **hoch** intelligent *very intelligent*

(b) *un-* negates and/or produces an opposite meaning

It closely resembles English ‘un-’. It is not always stressed, see 21.1.6c.

artig → **un** artig *naughty*
vorsichtig → **un** vorsichtig *incautious*
wahrscheinlich → **un** wahrscheinlich *improbable*

If an adjective already has a simple word as its opposite (e.g. *klug* – *dumm*), the form in *un-* gives a negative rather than an opposite. Thus, whilst *dumm* means ‘stupid’, *unklug* means ‘unwise’. In general, only adjectives with a positive meaning can form an opposite with *un-*. Thus, whilst *unschön* from *schön* is in common use, one does not find * *unhässlich* from *hässlich*.

(c) *ur-* with adjectives usually intensifies the sense

alt ↗ **ur** alt *very old* komisch ↗ **ur** komisch *very comical*

Sometimes, it gives the idea of ‘original’ or ‘typical’, e.g. *urdeutsch* ‘typically German’.

20.3.3 Adjective compounding

In general, adjective compounding is similar to noun compounding, see 20.2.4.

(a) Types of adjective compounds

In practice only the following are common:

- | | | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---|-------------|---------------------------------|
| (i) | noun + adjective: | die Pflicht + treu | ↗ | pflichttreu | <i>dutiful</i> |
| (ii) | verb + adjective: | trinken + fest | ↗ | trinkfest | <i>able to hold one's drink</i> |
| (iii) | adjective + adjective: | klein + laut | ↗ | kleinlaut | <i>meek</i> |

Adjective + adjective compounds are often ‘additive’, i.e. the qualities of both adjectives apply, e.g. *nasskalt* ‘cold and wet’.

(b) Many noun + adjective compounds have a linking element

These are similar to those in noun + noun compounds, see 20.2.4b. - *s* - and - *n* - are the most common, e.g. *geist es krank*, *gesundheit s schädlich*, *seite n verkehrt*.

(c) Some compound elements forming adjectives have now become suffixes

A number of adjectives are so widely used in modern German as the basis for

compound adjectives that they can be considered as suffixes rather than as distinct words.

(i) with the sense of having or possessing something:

-haltig → koffein **haltig** **-stark** → charakter **stark**

-reich → erlebnis **reich** **-(s)voll** → rücksicht **svoll**

(ii) with the sense of lacking something:

-arm → nikotin **arm** **-leer** → gedanken **leer**

-frei → alkohol **frei**

(iii) with the sense of being protected from something:

-dicht → schall **dicht** **-fest** → hitze **fest**

-echt → kuss **echt** **-sicher** → kugel **sicher**

(iv) with the sense of being similar to something:

-artig → kugel **artig** **-gleich** → masken **gleich**

-förmig → platten **förmig**

(v) with the sense of being capable of something:

-fähig → strapazier **fähig**

(vi) with the sense of being worth(y of) something:

-wert → lesens **wert** **-würdig** → nachahmens **würdig**

(vii) with the sense of needing something:

-bedürftig → korrektur **bedürftig**

20.4 Verb formation: general

New verbs are formed in German primarily by means of prefixes – largely because verbs have inflectional suffixes to show categories like tense, person and number. There are three main types of verb prefix in German:

- **inseparable prefixes** like *be* -, *emp* -, *ent* -, *er* -, *ge* -, *ver* - and *zer* -, e.g. *bestellen*, *erstehen*, *verbringen*. They are called inseparable prefixes because they always remain fixed to the root, and they are **always unstressed**, see 21.1.6c. Their past participle does not have the prefix *ge*-, (e.g. *bestellt*, *erstanden*, *verbracht*, see 10.2.1h). The formation of verbs with inseparable prefixes is treated in section 20.5.

- **separable prefixes**, of which there are a large number. The most typical are like prepositions, e.g. *ab* -, *an* -, *auf* -, etc., e.g. *abfahren*, *ankommen*, *aufmachen*, but they can also come from nouns, adverbs and other parts of speech, e.g. *teilnehmen*, *totschlagen*, *weglaufen*. They are called separable prefixes because they are separated from the root under certain conditions, e.g. *Wir kommen in München sehr früh an* (see 10.2.1i), and they are **always stressed**, see 21.1.6c. The formation of verbs with separable prefixes is dealt with in section 20.6.

- **variable prefixes**, which are separable in some cases and inseparable in others, often with a difference in meaning, e.g. *Sie übersetzte den Brief* ‘She translated the letter’ – *Sie setzten zum anderen Ufer über* ‘They crossed over to the other bank’. The prefixes *durch*-, *über*-, *um*- and *unter*- and one or two less common ones are variable. They are explained in section 20.7.

Other means of verb derivation are explained in 20.8.

20.5 Inseparable verb prefixes

Many patterns of forming verbs with inseparable prefixes are common and productive.

20.5.1 *be-*

(a) *be-* makes intransitive verbs transitive

See 16.3.4a. If the simple intransitive verb is used with a dative object or a prepositional object, that becomes the accusative object of the prefixed verb with *be-*, e.g.:

jdm. **be** dienen *serve sb.* (≡ jdm. dienen)

eine Frage **be** antworten *answer a question* (≡ auf eine Frage antworten)

(b) With transitive verbs *be-* can change the action to a different object

jdm. mit etwas **be** liefern *supply sb. with sth.* (≡ jdm. etwas liefern *deliver sth. to sb.*)

(c) *be-* forms verbs from nouns with the idea of providing something

With some verbs the suffix *-ig-* is added, and a few have *Umlaut*:

die Nachricht	→	be nachrichtigen	<i>notify</i>	die Sohle	→	be sohlen	<i>sole (a shoe)</i>
der Reifen	→	be reifen	<i>put tyres on</i>	das Wasser	→	be wässern	<i>irrigate</i>

(d) *be-* makes verbs from adjectives

These have the sense of giving someone or something that quality. With some verbs the suffix *-ig-* is added:

feucht	→	be feuchten	<i>moisten</i>	gerade	→	be gradigen	<i>straighten</i>
frei	→	be freien	<i>liberate</i>	ruhig	→	be ruhigen	<i>calm</i>

20.5.2 *ent-*

The prefix *emp-* is a variant of *ent-*, used before some roots beginning with *f*, e.g. *empfehlen*, *empfinden*.

(a) Verbs in *ent-* from verbs of motion have the idea of escaping or going away

What or who is being escaped from usually appears as a dative object with these verbs, see 16.4.2c, e.g.:

gleiten	→ jdm. ent gleiten <i>slip away from sb.</i> (e.g. glass from hand)
laufen	→ jdm./etwas ent laufen <i>run away/escape from sb./sth.</i>
reißen	→ jdm. etwas ent reißen <i>snatch sth. from sb.</i>

(b) Verbs in *ent-* can have the sense of removing something

These can be based on nouns, adjectives or other verbs, with *ent-* often corresponding to the English prefixes 'de-' or 'dis-':

das Gift	→ ent giften <i>decontaminate</i>	scharf	→ ent schärfen <i>tone down</i>
der Mut	→ ent mutigen <i>discourage</i>	spannen	→ ent spannen <i>relax</i>

20.5.3 *er-*

(a) Verbs in *er-* from other verbs often express the achievement or conclusion of an action

bitten	→ er bitten <i>get (sth.) by asking for it</i>
schießen	→ er schießen <i>shoot (sb.) dead</i>

A productive use of *er-* is to form verbs from verbs or nouns with the idea of acquiring something by the action expressed by the simple verb or the noun. Compare *erbitten* above and the following:

arbeiten	↪	Er hat etwas er arbeitet	<i>He got sth. by working for it</i>
die List	↪	Er hat etwas er listet	<i>He got sth. through cunning</i>

This use of *er-* is so productive that it is widely used with new roots from English, e.g. *etwas erbloggen* ‘get sth. by blogging’, *etwas ergoogeln* ‘to get sth. by googling’.

A handful of verbs in *er-* from other verbs point to the start of an action, e.g. *erklingen* ‘ring out’, *erbeben* ‘tremble’.

(b) Verbs in *er-* formed from adjectives express a change of state

i.e. either intransitive verbs with the idea of becoming something, or transitive verbs with the idea of making somebody or something have the quality expressed by the adjective. These verbs often have *Umlaut* of the root vowel, e.g.:

blind	↪	er blinden <i>become blind</i>	frisch	↪	er frischen <i>refresh</i>
rot	↪	er röten <i>turn red, blush</i>	leichter	↪	er leichtern <i>make easier</i>

20.5.4 *ver-*

This is the most widely used inseparable prefix, with a wide range of meanings. The following are the most frequent or productive:

(a) Many verbs in *ver-* from other verbs express the idea of finishing or ‘away’

blühen	↪	ver blühen <i>fade (flowers)</i>	hungern	↪	ver hungern <i>starve to death</i>
brauchen			klingen		

→ **ver** brauchen *consume*

→ **ver** klingen *fade away* (sounds)

(b) Some verbs in *ver-* from other verbs convey the notion of ‘wrongly’ or ‘to excess’

biegen → **ver** biegen *bend out of shape* salzen → **ver** salzen *put too much salt in sth.*

lernen → **ver** lernen *unlearn, forget*

This use is very productive and used widely with new roots, e.g. *Vergooglen Sie keine Zeit!* ‘Don’t waste your time searching on google’.

Some reflexive verbs in *ver-* have the idea of making a mistake, e.g.:

fahren → sich **ver** fahren *get lost, take a wrong turning*

wählen → sich **ver** wählen *misdial*

A few verbs in *ver-* are opposites, e.g.:

achten → **ver** achten *despise*

kaufen → **ver** kaufen *sell*

(c) Verbs in *ver-* formed from adjectives often express a change of state

As with *er-*, these can be intransitive verbs with the idea of becoming something, or transitive verbs with the idea of making somebody or something have the quality expressed by the adjective:

arm → **ver** armen *become poor* länger → **ver** längern *make longer*
einfach → **ver** einfachen *simplify* stumm → **ver** stummen *become silent*

Some verbs in *ver-* from nouns have a similar meaning, e.g.:

das Unglück → **ver** unglücken *have an accident*
der Sklave → **ver** sklaven *enslave*

(d) Many verbs formed from nouns with *ver-* convey the idea of providing with something

das Glas	→ ver glasen <i>glaze</i>	der Körper	→ ver körpern <i>embody</i>
das Gold	→ ver golden <i>gild</i>	der Zauber	→ ver zaubern <i>enchant</i>

This use of *ver-* is very productive and now widely used with originally English roots, e.g. *Verlink deine Seite gegen Geld* ‘Link up your website for cash’.

20.5.5 *zer-*

Verbs in *zer-*, which are mainly formed from other verbs, always convey the notion of ‘in pieces’:

beißen	→ zer beißen <i>bite into pieces</i>	fallen	→ zer fallen <i>disintegrate</i>
brechen	→ zer brechen <i>smash</i>	streuen	→ zer streuen <i>disperse</i>

20.6 Separable verb prefixes

SEPARABLE PREFIXES are so called because they are separated from the root under certain conditions, e.g. *Wir kommen sehr früh in München an*. For the difference between them and inseparable prefixes, see 20.4. Most separable prefixes also exist as independent words, chiefly as adverbs, prepositions, nouns or adjectives. The forms of separable verbs, in particular the position of the prefix, are explained in 10.2.1i. Separable prefixes are always **stressed**.

20.6.1 Simple separable prefixes

Most of these derive from prepositions or adverbs and their meanings are often transparent. The examples below illustrate some common and productive patterns of derivation.

Prefixes from prepositions expressing direction (e.g. *ab-*, *an-*, *auf-*) often have a less transparent or figurative sense because direction can be indicated by using a prefix with *her-* or *hin-*, see 7.2.4e.

(a) *ab-*

(i) = ‘away’: **ab** fahren *depart, leave* **ab** fliegen *take off*

(ii) = ‘down’: **ab** steigen *get down* **ab** setzen *put, set down*

(iii) completing an action: **ab** drehen *switch off* **ab** laufen *wear out* (e.g. shoes)

(b) *an-*

(i) with the idea of approaching: **an** kommen *arrive* **an** sprechen *address (sb.)*

(ii) indicating the start of an action: **an** machen *switch on* **an** brennen *catch fire*

(c) *auf-*

(i) = ‘up’ or ‘on’: **auf** bleiben *stay up* **auf** setzen *put on* (hat, water)

(ii) with the idea of a sudden start: **auf** lachen *burst out laughing* **auf** leuchten *light up*

(d) *aus-* = ‘out’ often pointing to the completion of an action:

aus brennen *burn out* **aus** bloggen *finish a blog*

(e) *ein-* is related to the preposition in, often with the idea of

becoming used to something:

ein fahren *run in* (i.e. new car) sich **ein** leben *settle down*

(f) **los-** most often has the meaning of beginning something:

los gehen *set off, start* **los** reißen *tear off, away*

(g) **mit-** indicates accompanying or cooperating:

mit arbeiten *cooperate* **mit** gehen *go with sb.*

(h) **vor-**

(i) going on or preceding: **vor** gehen *go ahead; be fast* (clock) **vor** stoßen *push forward*

(ii) demonstrating: **vor** lesen *read aloud* **vor** machen *show sb. how to do sth.*

(i) **weg-** = ‘away’:

weg bleiben *stay away* **weg** laufen *run away*

fort- is a less common (and more formal) alternative to **weg-** with some verbs: *fortbleiben, fortlaufen.*

(j) **weiter-** = ‘on’, ‘continue’:

weiter fahren *drive on* **weiter** machen *continue*

(k) **zu -**

- (i) indicating the direction of the action: **zu** hören *listen to* **zu** lächeln *smile at*
- (ii) adding: **zu** geben *add* **zu** zahlen *pay more*
- (iii) closing: **zu** drehen *turn off* (tap) **zu** gehen *close shut*

(l) Other simple prefixes are less frequent or no longer productive

bei-	bei treten	<i>join</i> (e.g. club)	bei tragen	<i>contribute</i>
da-	da bleiben	<i>stay on/behind</i>	da stehen	stand there
dar-	dar stellen	depict, represent	dar legen	explain, expound
fehl-	fehl gehen	miss one's way	fehl greifen	miss one's hold
inne-	inne haben	<i>occupy</i> (position)	inne halten	pause
nach-	nach ahmen	<i>imitate</i>	nach gehen	follow
nieder-	nieder brennen	<i>burn down</i>	nieder lassen	<i>lower, let down</i>

20.6.2 Compound separable prefixes

Some compound elements, mainly from adverbs, are widely used as separable prefixes

dabei-	(indicating proximity)	dabei stehen	<i>stand close by</i>
daneben-	(indicating missing sth.)	daneben schießen	<i>miss</i> (a shot)
davon-	(‘away’)	davon eilen	<i>hurry away</i>
dazu-	(indicating an addition)	dazu kommen	be added
empor-	(‘upwards’)	empor blicken	look up
entgegen-	(‘towards’)	entgegen nehmen	receive, accept
überein-	(indicating agreement)	überein kommen	agree
voraus-	(‘in advance’)	voraus sagen	foretell, predict
vorbei-, vorüber-	(‘past’)	vorbei gehen	pass
zurück-	(‘back’)	zurück fahren	drive back, return
zusammen-	(‘together’ or ‘up’)	zusammen rücken	move together
		zusammen falten	<i>fold up</i>

The compound directional adverbs in **hin-** and **her-**, see 7.2.4, are also commonly

used as separable prefixes, e.g. *hinausgehen*, *herunterkommen*. Other compound elements, e.g. **drauf-**, **hintan-**, **vorweg-**, **zuvor-** are used with one or two verbs only, e.g. *vorwegnehmen* ‘anticipate’.

20.6.3 Separable prefix or separate word?

In the spelling rules in force before 1996, some nouns, verbs and adjectives were treated as separable prefixes and written together with the verb according to the same rules as for separable prefixes, e.g. *achtgeben* ‘pay heed’, *radfahren* ‘cycle’, *liebgewinnen* ‘grow fond of’, *offenlassen* ‘leave open’.

As there were no clear rules as to which combinations could be treated as separable verbs, there were many exceptions and anomalies, and the new spelling rules prescribe that most of these combinations should be spelled as separate words in all their forms, e.g. *Acht geben*, *Rad fahren*, *lieb gewinnen*, *offen lassen*.

The following rules now apply:

(a) Combinations of noun + verb are now normally spelled as separate words

Halt machen: ich mache Halt, sie machte Halt, sie haben Halt gemacht

Maß halten: ich halte Maß, sie hielt Maß, sie haben Maß gehalten

Ski laufen: ich laufe Ski, sie lief Ski, sie sind Ski gelaufen

An exception is made of the following nouns, which are taken to have lost their full meaning in combinations with a verb and are seen as separable prefixes:

<i>heim-</i>	<i>irre-</i>	<i>preis-</i>	<i>stand-</i>	<i>statt-</i>	<i>teil-</i>	<i>wett-</i>	<i>wunder-</i>
heimgehen	<i>go home</i>	standhalten	<i>stand firm</i>	wettmachen		<i>make up for</i>	
irreführen	<i>mislead</i>	stattfinden	<i>take place</i>	wundernehmen		<i>surprise</i>	
preisgeben	<i>expose</i>	teilnehmen	<i>participate</i>				

leidtun is now treated like this again, following the most recent revision of the

reform, and forms which do not exist as separate words are also treated as separable prefixes, e.g. **fehlschlagen**, **feilbieten**, **kopfstehen**, **kundgeben**, **weismachen**.

(b) Combinations of adjective or adverb + verb are normally written together

aneinanderfügen	<i>join together</i>	kurztreten	<i>go easy</i>
anheimfallen	fall victim to	leichtmachen	make sth. easy
aufwärtsgehen	do better	nahelegen	suggest
durcheinanderbringen	muddle up	überhandnehmen	get out of hand
fernliegen	<i>be far from</i>	übrigbleiben	<i>be left over</i>

In particular adjectives and adverbs consisting of a **preposition and -einander** are always written together with the verb. However, if the first element is a phrase (or derives from a phrase, e.g. *instand setzen*), it is always written separately from the verb (see also 21.3.1).

Similarly, adjectives and adverbs which cannot be used in the comparative in conjunction with the verb, or be modified by *sehr* or *ganz*, are seen to form fixed idiomatic combinations with the verb. They are considered to be separable prefixes and always written together:

bereithalten	<i>have ready</i>	gutschreiben	<i>credit</i>
bloßstellen	show up	schwarzarbeiten	moonlight
fernsehen	watch TV	totschlagen	<i>kill</i>
festsetzen	<i>fix</i>		

One can, for instance say *ich sehe fern*, but it is not possible to say * *ich sehe ferner*, and *ich sehe sehr fern* can only have its literal meaning of ‘I am looking a long way’.

However, if the adjective expresses a property which is the result of the action of the verb, the two parts may be written together **or** separately. The most frequent of these are:

kaltstellen/kalt stellen *exclude, put out of the way*

kaputtmachen/kaputt machen *break, smash*

kleinschneiden/klein schneiden *cut up small*

Some verbs look as if they have prefixes, but they are actually formed from compound nouns and the first element does not separate, e.g.:

frühstücken *breakfast*: ich frühstücke, ich habe gefrühstückt, etc.

Similarly: *handhaben* ‘manipulate’, *langweilen* ‘bore’, *liebkosen* ‘caress’, *wetteifern* ‘compete’.

(c) Combinations of verb or participle + verb are generally written as separate words

gefangen nehmen	<i>take captive</i>	spazieren gehen	<i>go for a walk</i>
laufen lernen	<i>learn to walk</i>	verloren gehen	<i>be lost</i>

However, combinations with *bleiben* or *lassen*, and also the combination *kennen lernen* may be written together, especially if the combination is felt to have a distinct meaning. This means that either possibility is allowed:

fallen lassen/fallenlassen *drop*

kennen lernen/kennenlernen *get to know*

stehen bleiben/stehenbleiben *stop*

(d) Combinations with the verb sein are always written as separate words

This applies even with forms which are normally taken as separable prefixes:

da sein	<i>be there</i>	los sein	<i>be up</i>	zufrieden sein	<i>be satisfied</i>
inne sein	<i>be conscious of</i>	vorbei sein	<i>be past</i>	zurück sein	<i>be back</i>

(e) Defective compound verbs are always written as a single word

These are verbs which have a special meaning and are only used in the form of the infinitive and/or the past participle. They are especially frequent in technical language.

(i) Some compounds only exist in the infinitive form:

brustschwimmen	<i>swim breast-stroke</i>	segelfliegen	<i>glide</i>
kettenrauchen	<i>chain-smoke</i>	wettlaufen	<i>race</i>

For instance, you can say *ich gehe morgen segelfliegen*, but not * *ich segelfliege*

(ii) Some compounds are only used in the infinitive and the past participle:

seiltanzen *walk the tightrope* uraufführen *perform for the first time*

With these, you can say, for example, *Das neue Stück wird morgen uraufgeführt*, but not * *Morgen uraufführt man das neue Stück*.

(iii) There may be uncertainty in the formation of the past participle of such verbs. With a number, the first element can be treated as if it were a separable prefix, and the prefix *ge-* of the participle inserted between this and the root of the verb, e.g.:

notlanden *make an emergency landing* ↗ genotlandet *or* notgelandet

schutzimpfen *innoculate* ↗ geschutzimpft *or* schutzgeimpft

The same applies to several recent verbs loaned from or modelled on English with prepositions or adverbs as their first element, e.g.:

doppelklicken ↗ gedoppelklickt *or* doppelgeklickt

downloaden ↗ gedownloadet *or* downgeloadet

outsourcen ↗ outgesourct *or* geoutsourct

upgraden ↗ geupgradet *or* upgegradet

If such verbs have - *ge-* inserted in the past participle, the *zu* of the infinitive can also be incorporated in the verb, e.g. *doppelzuklicken*, *outzusourcen*.

20.7 Variable verb prefixes

A small number of prefixes can form both separable and inseparable verbs. **If the verb is separable, the prefix is stressed, if it is inseparable, the prefix is unstressed.**

20.7.1 *durch-*

durch- always expresses the idea of ‘through’, whether separable or inseparable.

(a) A few compounds with *durch-* are only inseparable

*durch*ˈdenken *think through* *durch*ˈleben *experience* *durch*ˈlöchern *make holes in*

Separable *ˈdurchdenken* is also found with the identical meaning to *durch*ˈdenken, but it is less common.

(b) Many compounds with *durch-* are only separable

ˈdurchblicken <i>look through</i>	ˈdurchführen <i>carry out</i>
ˈdurchkommen <i>get through, succeed</i>	ˈdurchrosten <i>rust through</i>
ˈdurchfallen <i>fall through/fail</i>	ˈdurchhalten <i>hold out, survive</i>
ˈdurchkriechen <i>crawl through</i>	ˈdurchsehen <i>look through</i>

(c) Some verbs form separable and inseparable compounds with *durch-*

The separable compounds always mean ‘right the way through’. The inseparable verbs emphasize penetration without necessarily reaching the other side. However, the distinction may be fine, especially with verbs of motion. Compare:

Er **eilte** durch die Vorhalle **durch** *He hurried through the vestibule*

Er **durcheilte** die Vorhalle *He hurried across the vestibule*

Er **ritt** durch den Wald **durch** *He crossed the forest on horseback*

Er **durchritt** den Wald *He rode through the forest*

Similarly:

durchbrechen *break through*

durchschauen *see through*

durchdringen *penetrate*

durchfahren *travel through*

durchlaufen *run through*

durchstoßen *break through*

durchreisen *travel through*

durchwachen *stay awake*

However, the separable and inseparable meanings are quite distinct in the case of *durchsetzen*, as separable ‘*durchsetzen*’ means ‘carry through’, whilst inseparable *durchsetzen* means ‘infiltrate’. The distinction is also clear with *durchkämmen* ‘comb through’ in that separable ‘*durchkämmen*’ is only used in a literal sense, of hair, whereas inseparable *durchkämmen* has the figurative meaning of ‘search thoroughly in’.

20.7.2 *hinter-*

hinter- normally forms inseparable compounds

hintergehen *deceive*

hinterfragen *analyse*

hinterlassen *leave, bequeathe*

hinterlegen *deposit*

hintertreiben *foil, thwart*

Separable compounds with *hinter-* are non-standard regionalisms, e.g. ‘*hinterbringen*’ ‘take to the back’, ‘*hintergehen*’ ‘go to the back’.

20.7.3 *miss-*

miss- is generally inseparable. It has two main senses, i.e.:

(i) ‘**opposite**’: *missachten* *despise, disdain* *misstrauen* *distrust*

(ii) ‘**badly**’, ‘**wrongly**’: *missdeuten* *misinterpret* *misshandeln* *ill-treat*

With a few verbs *miss-* can be treated as separable in the past participle and the infinitive with *zu*, e.g. *missgeachtet*, *misszuachten*, see 11.1.2b. These forms are alternatives to the regular inseparable forms *missachtet*, *zu missachten* and are generally less frequent, with the exception of *missverstehen*, where the extended infinitive most commonly has the form *misszuverstehen*.

20.7.4 *ob-*

ob- is mainly inseparable. There are very few verbs with the prefix *ob-* in current use, e.g. **obliegen** ‘to be incumbent’, **obsiegen** ‘to prevail’, and they are limited to use in formal registers. They are most often inseparable, e.g.:

Die Beweislast obliegt dem Ankläger *The burden of proof is on the prosecutor*

However, all can be used separably, e.g. *Das liegt dem Ankläger ob*, although this alternative is less frequent.

20.7.5 *über-*

(a) A few compounds with *über-* are only separable

They are all intransitive and have the literal meaning ‘over’, e.g.:

‘überhängen *overhang*
‘überkippen *keel over*

‘überkochen *boil over*

(b) A large number of compounds with *über-* are only inseparable

They are all transitive and have a variety of meanings, i.e.:

(i) repetition: *über'arbeiten* *rework* *über'prüfen* *check*

(ii) more than enough: *über'fordern* *overtax* *über'treiben* *exaggerate*

(iii) failing to notice: *über'hören* *fail to hear* *über'sehen* *overlook*

(iv) 'over': *über'denken* *think over* *über'fallen* *attack*

(c) Many verbs form both separable and inseparable compounds with *über-*

The separable compounds are mostly intransitive. They all have the literal meaning 'over'. The inseparable verbs are mostly transitive, with a more figurative meaning often similar to those given under (b) above:

	separable	inseparable
<i>überfahren</i>	<i>cross over</i>	<i>run over</i>
<i>überführen</i>	transfer	convict
<i>übergehen</i>	turn into sth.	leave out
<i>überlaufen</i>	overflow; desert	overrun
<i>überlegen</i>	put sth. over sb./sth.	consider
<i>übersetzen</i>	ferry over	translate
<i>überspringen</i>	jump over	skip
<i>übertreten</i>	change over	infringe
<i>überziehen</i>	<i>put on</i>	<i>cover</i>

übersiedeln 'move (house)' can be used as a separable **or** inseparable verb with no distinction in meaning.

20.7.6 *um-*

(a) A large number of compounds in *um-* are only separable

Most express the idea of turning or changing a state:

'umblicken <i>look round</i>	'umkommen <i>die, perish</i>
'umbringen <i>kill</i>	'umschalten <i>switch</i>
'umdrehen <i>turn round</i>	'umsteigen <i>change (trains, etc.)</i>
'umfallen <i>fall over</i>	

(b) Many compounds in *um-* are only inseparable

They all express encirclement or surrounding:

um'armen <i>embrace</i>	um'ringen <i>surround</i>
um'fassen <i>embrace, encircle</i>	um'segeln <i>sail round, circumnavigate</i>
um'geben <i>surround</i>	um'zingeln <i>surround, encircle</i>

(c) Many verbs form separable and inseparable compounds in *um-*

The difference in meaning corresponds to that given in (a) and (b) above:

	separable	inseparable
umbauen	<i>rebuild</i>	<i>enclose</i>
umbrechen	break up	set (i.e. type)
umfahren	run over, knock down	travel round
umgehen	circulate	avoid
umreißen	tear down	outline
umschreiben	rewrite	paraphrase
umstellen	<i>rearrange</i>	<i>surround</i>

20.7.7 *unter-*

(a) A large number of compounds in *unter-* are only separable

They generally have a literal meaning, i.e. 'under', e.g.:

'unterbringen *accommodate* 'unterkommen *find accommodation*
'untergehen *sink, decline* 'untersetzen *put underneath*

(b) Many compounds in *unter-* are only inseparable

They have a variety of meanings, i.e.:

(i) less than enough:

unter'bieten *undercut* unter'schreiten *fall short*
unter'schätzen *underestimate* unter'steuern *understeer*

(ii) 'under':

unter'drücken *suppress, oppress* unter'schreiben *sign*
unter'liegen *be defeated* unter'stützen *support*

(iii) other, miscellaneous meanings:

unter'bleiben *cease* unter'richten *teach*
unter'brechen *interrupt* unter'sagen *forbid, prohibit*
unter'lassen *refrain from* unter'laufen *occur*
unter'suchen *investigate*

(c) Many verbs form separable and inseparable compounds with *unter-*

The separable verbs are mostly intransitive and have the meaning 'under'. The

inseparable compounds are all transitive, and most have a more figurative meaning:

	separable	inseparable
unterbinden	<i>tie underneath</i>	<i>prevent</i>
untergraben	dig in	undermine
unterhalten	hold underneath	entertain
unterlegen	put underneath	underlay
unterschieben	foist	insinuate
unterschlagen	<i>cross (e.g. legs)</i>	embezzle
unterstellen	<i>keep, store</i>	assume
unterziehen	<i>put on underneath</i>	<i>undergo</i>

20.7.8 *voll-*

(a) Many verbs form compounds with *voll-* which are only separable

They all have the meaning ‘full’, e.g.:

‘vollbekommen *manage to fill*’ ‘vollschreiben *fill with writing*

‘vollstopfen *cram full*’ ‘volltanken *fill up* (car with fuel)

(b) A few compounds with *voll-* are only inseparable

Most of these are words used in formal registers with the meaning ‘complete’, ‘finish’ or ‘accomplish’:

voll‘bringen *achieve, accomplish* voll‘strecken *execute, carry out*

voll‘enden *complete* voll‘ziehen *execute, carry out*

voll‘führen *execute, perform*

20.7.9 *wider-*

wider- usually forms inseparable verbs

wider'legen *refute* wider'stehen *resist*

Only two verbs in *wider-* are separable:

'widerhallen *echo, reverberate* 'widerspiegeln *reflect*

widerspiegeln is sometimes used inseparably, but this is less frequent and only in the present tense.

20.7.10 *wieder-*

wieder- usually forms separable verbs

'wiederkehren *return* 'wiedersehen *see again*

Only **one** verb prefixed with *wieder-* is inseparable: *wieder'holen* 'repeat'.

20.8 Verb formation by means other than prefixes

By far the most productive means of creating verbs is by means of prefixes but some other patterns are frequent or productive.

20.8.1 Many verbs are formed simply from nouns or adjectives

The simplest way to convert a noun or an adjective to a verb is to **add verbal endings** (i.e. those indicating person, number, tense, etc.) **to the root of the noun or the adjective**.

These have a variety of meanings, and some add *Umlaut*, especially the verbs

from adjectives which have the sense of giving something a particular quality:

der Dampf	↗dampfen <i>steam</i>	falsch	↗fälschen <i>forge, falsify</i>
der Donner	↗donnern <i>thunder</i>	krank	↗kranken <i>suffer</i>
die Feder	↗federn <i>be springy</i>	kurz	↗kürzen <i>shorten</i>
der Fluch	↗fluchen <i>curse</i>	leer	↗leeren <i>empty</i>
das Fohlen	↗fohlen <i>foal (of mare)</i>	reif	↗reifen <i>ripen</i>
der Hammer	↗hämmern <i>hammer</i>	scharf	↗schärfen <i>sharpen</i>
die Kachel	↗kacheln <i>tile</i>	schwarz	↗schwärzen <i>blacken</i>
der Kellner	↗kellnern <i>work as a waiter</i>	trocken	↗trocknen <i>dry</i>
der Löffel	↗löffeln <i>spoon</i>	wach	↗wachen <i>be awake</i>
der Splitter	↗splintern <i>splinter</i>	welk	↗welken <i>wilt</i>

This means of verb formation is also widely employed with new roots from English, e.g. *bloggen* (from *das Blog*), *jetten* (from *der Jet*), *simsen* (from *die SMS* = 'short message service'), *tweeten* (from *die Tweet*).

20.8.2 Other ways of forming verbs

(a) Weak verbs formed from strong verbs with vowel change

These verbs typically mean 'cause to do sth.' This pattern is no longer productive, but its results are still common. In general, a transitive weak verb has been formed from an intransitive strong verb:

ertrinken <i>drown</i> (intr.)	↗ertränken <i>drown</i> (trans.)	sitzen <i>sit</i>	↗setzen <i>set</i>
fallen <i>fall</i>	↗fällen <i>fell</i>	springen <i>jump</i>	↗sprengen <i>blow up</i>

(b) Verbs in *-eln* express a weaker form of the action

They usually have *Umlaut*:

husten <i>cough</i>	↗hüsten <i>cough slightly</i>	lachen <i>laugh</i>	↗lächeln <i>smile</i>
krank <i>ill, sick</i>	↗kränkeln <i>be sickly</i>	streichen <i>stroke</i>	↗streicheln <i>caress</i>

Some such verbs have a pejorative sense, e.g. tanzen *dance* ↗tänzeln *prance*.

This formation is productive and can be based on nouns or adjectives as well as on other verbs:

fromm <i>pious</i>	↗frömmeln <i>affect piety</i>
der Schwabe <i>Swabian</i>	↗schwäbeln <i>speak with a Swabian accent</i>

(c) The suffix *-ieren* is mainly used to form verbs from foreign words

The source of most verbs in *-ieren* (and its derivatives *-isieren* and *-ifizieren*) is French or Latin. Some have entered German directly from French verbs in *-er*, e.g. arranger ↗arrangieren.

Others have been formed in German from the roots of words taken into German from these or other languages, e.g. *das Tabu* ↗tabuisieren.

Only a very few are formed from German roots: *der Buchstabe* ↗buchstabieren is the most obvious exception.

Spelling, pronunciation and punctuation

German spelling and punctuation are relatively consistent, but some usages and rules are quite different to those for English, and this chapter gives information on these. The rulings given are those accepted as authoritative in all the countries where German is an official language.

Uniform official spelling rules for the German-speaking countries were first established in 1901/02. Towards the end of the twentieth century it was felt that the rulings made then and subsequently had left some unnecessary inconsistencies and anomalies which needed to be eliminated. For this reason, the countries involved agreed in 1994/95 on a set of reforms which began to be introduced in primary schools in 1996. For a transitional period the old and the new spellings were permitted, but from 2006 only the new spellings have been regarded as correct for official purposes, in particular in schools and other state institutions.

Although the changes were not far-reaching, this spelling reform gave rise to considerable controversy, and numerous attempts were made, even through the law-courts, to reverse the decision to introduce it. Although these were ultimately unsuccessful, and the waves of protest have subsided to a certain extent, they resulted in a succession of (relatively minor) changes to the reforms, which resulted in a final version of the new rules being issued in March 2006, with minor modifications in 2011 in respect of the spelling of some foreign words. By 2016 all but a very few newspapers and books were using the reformed spellings (or a version of them), and although some well-known authors insisted initially on keeping to the traditional rules, their recent books have appeared with the

new spellings.

All the same, even twenty years after the original reform proposals, opinion polls have consistently shown a majority opposing them, and many people who finished their schooling before the reform stick to the old rules for private use – or a mixture of old and new, because the successive modifications to the reform have created a widespread feeling of uncertainty about what is actually correct.

In this way, learners are likely to be confronted with both sets of spellings for some time, but they are recommended to adhere strictly to the new rules, as they are the only ones regarded as officially correct. Full details of them, together with a comprehensive wordlist, can be downloaded from the website of the *Institut für Deutsche Sprache* (www1.ids-mannheim.de/). **The most recent version of the reformed spelling has been applied consistently in this book, and the information given in this chapter relates exclusively to it.** In particular, we deal with:

- **spelling and pronunciation** (section 21.1)
- the use of **capital letters** (section 21.2)
- whether to write **one word or two** (section 21.3)
- other **miscellaneous points** of spelling (section 21.4)
- the use of the **comma** (section 21.5)
- the use of other **punctuation marks** (section 21.6)

21.1 Spelling and pronunciation

The relationship between letters and the sounds they represent is more straightforward in German than in English and, in general, each sound of German corresponds to a single letter or group of letters. However, there are a

few exceptions to this, and the main aim of this section is to give information on these cases.

Where necessary, the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) are used to make clear precisely what sounds are involved and, following normal conventions in phonetics, they are given in square brackets. A table of the IPA symbols can be found on **page xxi**.

The accepted ‘standard’ pronunciation of German is based on a set of norms originally established by a commission which met in 1898 to establish the best pronunciation for use on the stage, and is thus called *Bühnenaussprache*. This is now usually referred to as *Hochlautung*, or often simply as *Hochdeutsch* (although this term strictly speaking covers standard grammar and vocabulary as well as pronunciation). This was originally a set of rather formal norms, but a modified form of them is now widely accepted as an ideal to aim for, especially for foreign learners, and the information in this section is based on this.

Although these norms are predominantly North German, they are generally regarded as reflecting the ‘best’ usage, and they are acceptable everywhere. There is, of course, much variation in actual usage within Germany and (especially) the other German-speaking countries, but a book such as this can only give information on the most important instances of such variation.

21.1.1 *b, d and g*

(a) *b, d* and *g* are pronounced as [p], [t] and [k] at the end of a word or syllable, or before a consonant

Sieb	[zi:p]	abfahren	[apfa:ʁən]	habt	[hapt]
Rad	[ʁa:t]	kundgeben	[kuntge:bən]	sagt	[za:kt]
Zug	[tsu:k]	wegfahren	[vɛkfa:ʁən]		

Otherwise, i.e. at the beginning of a word or between vowels, *b, d* and *g* are pronounced [b], [d] and [g], as in English.

(b) There are two exceptions to this rule in respect of *g*

(i) In the ending - *ig*, *g* is pronounced as *ch*, i.e. [ç]

König [kø:nɪç] sandig [zandɪç] Außig [aʊsɪç]

(ii) In **North and Central Germany**, *g* is often pronounced like *ch* (i.e. as [ç] or [x]) in all other cases when it occurs at the end of a word or syllable, or before a consonant

Zug [tsu:x] wegfahren [vɛçfa:ʁən] sagt [za:xt]

This pronunciation is not considered standard, but it is in practice almost universal usage by a majority of speakers across the northern two-thirds of Germany, i.e. north of the river Main.

21.1.2 *ch*

(a) The pronunciation of *ch* differs depending on the preceding sound

(i) After low and back vowels, i.e. *a*, *o* and *u*, *ch* is pronounced [x]:

Bach [bax] Loch [lɔx] Buch [bu:x] Bauch [baʊx]

(ii) After front vowels, i.e. *i*, *e*, *ü* and *ö*, after *l* and *r*, and in the suffix - *che* *n*, *ch* is pronounced [ç]:

mich [mɪç] echt [ɛçt] Bücher [by:çɐ] Löcher [lœçɐ]
Milch [mɪlç] Kirche [kɪʁçə] Veilchen [faɪlçən]

(b) The pronunciation of *ch* at the beginning of a word

(i) In most words it is always pronounced [k], e.g.:

Chamäleon, Chaos, Charakter, Chlor, Cholera, Chor, Christ, Chrom, Chronik

(ii) In words originally from French it is pronounced [ʃ], e.g.:

Champagner, Chance, Charme, Chauffeur, Chef, Chirurg

(iii) In a few words it is pronounced [ç] in the North (i.e. north of the Main), but in the South (including Austria and Switzerland) it is pronounced [k]. The most frequent of these words are:

Charisma, Chemie, Chile, China

Either pronunciation is accepted as standard.

(c) The combination *chs* is pronounced [ks]

wachsen	[vaksən]	Fuchs	[föks]	Achse	[aksə]
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21.1.3 Other consonants

(a) *s* is pronounced [s] except in the following contexts

(i) At the beginning of a word before a vowel, and between vowels, *s* is pronounced [z]:

suchen	[zu:xən]	sandig	[zandɪç]	lesen	[le:zən]
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(ii) At the beginning of a word before *p* and *t*, *s* is pronounced [ʃ]:

spielen	[ʃpi:lən]	Straße	[ʃtra:sə]
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(b) *ng* is always pronounced [ŋ]

It is never pronounced [ŋ g] as in some English words. Compare, for example, the difference between English *finger* [fɪ ŋ gə] and German *Finger* [fɪ ŋ ɐ].

21.1.4 Long and short vowels

English-speaking learners need to pay attention to the distinction between long and short vowels in German, as there are significant differences from English. In particular, **German long vowels are consistently long**.

The problem is not helped by the fact that this distinction is the area where German spelling is least systematic, and the difference between long and short vowels is not always clearly shown. The main rules (and exceptions) are as follows:

(a) Vowels before double consonants are always short

This rule applies whether the double consonant is in the middle or at the end of the word.

bitte	[bitə]	fallen	[falən]	Klasse	[klasə]	Acker	[akɐ]
Butt	[bʊt]	Schiff	[ʃɪf]	knapp	[knap]	Pack	[pak]

k is never doubled in spelling, and *ck* is used instead.

(b) Vowels before single consonants are usually long

This rule applies whether the consonant is in the middle or at the end of the word.

geben	[ge:bən]	lösen	[lø:zən]	Hefe	[he:fə]	üben	[y:bən]
gab	[ga:p]	Tag	[ta:k]	Chor	[ko:ɕ]	Mut	[mu:t]

Note that **ß counts as a single consonant**, and this is the main reason why it is used in contrast to *ss* (see 21.4.1). Compare:

Fuß	[fu:s]	Fluss	[flʊs]	Maße	[ma:sə]	Masse	[masə]
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Some loan-words from English are an exception to this rule, as they end in a single consonant but have a short vowel, e.g. *Bus* [bʊs], *Jet* [dʒet]. When such

words have an ending, the consonant is doubled: *Busse, jetten*.

(c) Vowels before clusters of more than one consonant are usually short

Gang	[gaŋ]	Pflicht	[pflɪçt]	Mast	[mast]	Werk	[vɛɪk]
sitzen	[zɪtsən]	Sünde	[zyndə]	schuften	[ʃʊftən]	Wespe	[vɛspə]

However, this rule is not consistent, and there are several common exceptions, e.g.:

Art	[a:ɪt]	atmen	[a:tmən]	Geburt	[gəbu:ɪt]	Jagd	[ja:kt]
Krebs	[kʁe:ps]	Mond	[mo:nt]	regnen	[ʁe:gnən]	trösten	[tʁø:stən]

Inflected forms of words or derived words keep a long vowel, even if the ending results in a consonant cluster:

lösen [lø:zən]	˜löste [lø:stə]	Tag [ta:k]	˜Tags [ta:ks]
Hof [ho:f]	˜höflich [hø:flɪç]	sagen [za:gən]	˜sagbar [za:kba:ɪ]

(d) Vowels before *ch* may be long or short

In practice, each word needs to be remembered separately:

Loch	[lɔx]	Hochzeit	[hɔxtsaɪt]	brechen	[brɛçən]
hoch	[ho:x]	fluchen	[flu:xən]	brach	[bra:x]

(e) Other ways of marking long vowels

(i) Especially before *m*, *n*, *l* and *r*, a long vowel can be shown by **the silent letter h**:

lahm	[la:m]	Bühne	[by:nə]	Höhle	[hø:lə]	fahren	[fa:ɪən]
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(ii) In a few words, a long vowel is shown by doubling the vowel letter:

Schnee	[ʃne:]	Saal	[za:l]	Heer	[he:ɪ]	Moos	[mo:s]
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(iii) Long [i:] is usually spelled *ie*, e.g. *Lied* [li: t], *Sieg* [zi: k], *Miene* [mi: nə]

(iv) A single vowel at the end of a word is long, e.g. *du* [du:], *wo* [vo:]

21.1.5 The vowel *ä*

Short *ä* is always pronounced [ɛ], i.e. identically to *e*, e.g. *Kräfte* [k ʁɛ ftə], *Gäste* [gɛstə]. Standard pronunciation prescribes that long *ä* should be pronounced [ɛ:], e.g.:

wäre [vɛ:ʁə] gäbe [gɛ:bə] Bär [bɛ:ʁ] Väter [vɛ:tɐ]

However, this ruling is widely ignored, especially in North Germany, and many people usually pronounce long *ä* and long *e* identically, as [e:], e.g. *wäre* [vɛ:ʁ ə], *gäbe* [ge: bə], etc. Indeed, the pronunciation [ɛ:] can sound affected. In practice it is most often used, if at all, in subjunctive forms like *gäbe*, in order to make the distinction from the indicative *gebe* clear.

21.1.6 Word stress

Like in English, one syllable in all German words of more than one syllable is pronounced with rather more force than the others. **This syllable is said to be stressed.** However, there is no absolute rule about **which** syllable in a German word is stressed, although there are certain regularities.

(a) In most native German words the stress falls on the first syllable of the word

ˈMonat ˈBruder ˈgestern ˈGlaube ˈArbeit ˈElend ˈSegel

There are very few exceptions to this rule, the most common are:

Foˈrelle Hoˈlunder Horˈnisse Karˈtoffel leˈbendig Wachˈolder

(b) The position of the stress remains constant in native German words

i.e. it falls on the same syllable irrespective of any endings which might be added:

‘ Mo nate ‘ glau ben ‘ glaub haft ‘ Glaub haftigkeit ‘ glaub würdig

The only exception is that the suffix - *ei* is always stressed: *Bäcker’ ei*, *Bücher’ ei*

(c) Stress in words with prefixes

(i) Some prefixes are always unstressed, whether on nouns, adjectives or verbs, i.e. *be* -, *emp* -, *ent* -, *er* -, *ge* -, *ver* -, *zer* -. With verbs these prefixes are inseparable, see 20.5.

emp’fangen Emp’fang emp’fänglich Ge’schichte ver’stehen Ver’stand

(ii) Most other prefixes are stressed. With verbs, these prefixes are separable, see 20.6.

‘abfahren ‘Abfahrt ‘abhängig ‘einfallen ‘Einfall ‘einfältig

It has recently been reported that some adverbs of this type are starting to be pronounced with stress on the second syllable, in particular *an’ geblich*, *an’ scheinend* and *aus’ führlich*, possibly because their meaning is no longer seen as linked to the verbs *angeben*, etc. It is not clear how widespread this change of stress is, whether any other words are affected, or whether it is considered non-standard.

(iii) A few verb prefixes can be stressed or unstressed, usually with a difference in meaning, see 20.7. Nouns derived from these verbs normally keep the same stress as the original verb:

über’ fah ren *run over* ‘ üb erfahren *cross over* ‘ Üb erfahrt *crossing*
über’ le gen *consider* ‘ üb erlegen *put/lay over* Über’ le gung *consideration*

(iv) The prefix **miss** - is variable with verbs, see 20.7.3, but with nouns in *miss*- the prefix is always stressed:

miss' **brau** chen *misuse* ' **Miss** brauch *misuse*

(v) The prefix **un** - is usually stressed in nouns and adjectives if the form with *un*- is a straightforward negative of the form without *un*-, see 20.2.2j and 20.3.2b:

schuld'ig *guilty* ' **un** schuld'ig *innocent* Wetter *weather* ' **Un** wetter *bad weather*

However, **un** - with some adjectives is not stressed. This is especially (but not universally) the case if there is no corresponding adjective without *un*-, or if there is some change of meaning other than simple negation, e.g.:

unauf' **hör** lich *incessant* uner' **hört** *outrageous* un' **mög** lich *impossible*

In addition, *un*- tends not to be stressed in adjectives with the prefix *un*- and the suffix - *bar*, or with the suffix - *lich* where it corresponds to English - *able* or - *ible*, cf. 20.3.1.

unbe' **wohn** bar *uninhabitable* unent' **behr** lich *indispensable*

(d) Stress in words of foreign origin

German words of French, Greek or Latin origin often have a different stress pattern to native words.

(i) They are characteristically stressed on the **final syllable**, e.g.:

ak' tiv	feu' dal	Phy' sik	Reper' toire
Al' tar	Konso' nant	Poli' zist	Ro' man
Biolo' gie	Kon' trast	Reforma' tion	Stu' dent
Ele' ganz	Na' tur	Re' gime	Universi' tät

Exceptionally, a few words in - *ik* are stressed on the penultimate syllable, e.g. ' *Go thik*, *Gram' ma tik*, ' *Lo gik*. When - *er* is suffixed to words in stressed - *ik*,

the stress shifts back a syllable, e.g. ' *Phys iker*, Po' *lit iker*.

(ii) Foreign words with some endings are characteristically **stressed on the penultimate syllable**. Many of these have the vowel [ə] in the final syllable, or the final syllable is - *as*, - *is*, - *o s*, - *us* or - *um*:

' Al bum	Fa' mi lie	Pas' sa ge	Sozia' lis mus
' At las	' Fis kus	Prog' no se	Sozio' lo ge
Bri' ga de	' Kos mos	ren' ta bel	Ta' be lle
Chi' ne se	La' ven del	Schoko' la de	' Zen trum

Note the different treatment of words spelled with final -*ie*. If it is pronounced [i:] it is stressed, e.g. *Biolo' gie*, but if it is pronounced [jə] the preceding syllable is stressed, e.g. *Fa' mi lie*.

(iii) Words with the suffixes - *on* and - *or* are usually stressed on the preceding syllable, e.g.:

'Autor 'Dämon Di'rektor 'Doktor Pro'fessor 'Traktor

In these words the stress shifts when the plural ending -*en* is added:

Au'toren Dä'monen Direk'toren Dok'toren Profes'soren Trak'toren

Motor can be stressed on either syllable, i.e. ' *Mo tor* or *Mo' tor*, but the plural is always *Mo' tor en*.

(iv) **Adjectives in - *isch*** from foreign roots (see 20.3.1e) are stressed on the preceding syllable:

bio' lo gisch ' mo disch musi' ka lisch no' ma disch

(v) Although stress on the final or penultimate syllable is generally characteristic of foreign words, there are many which are stressed on the first syllable, e.g.:

' Al batros ' Al gebra ' Kä nguru ' Ko rridor ' Pub likum

21.2 Capital letters

The basic rules are that **initial capital letters** are used:

- for the **first word in a sentence** (or a line of poetry)
- for **all nouns**, e.g. *der Sack, die Schwierigkeit, das Bürgertum, die Pfirsiche*
- for the ‘**polite**’ **second person pronoun** *Sie* and all its forms, e.g. *Ihnen, Ihr*, etc., see 3.3
- for **proper names**, e.g. *Frankfurt, Deutschland, das Schwarze Meer*

All other words begin with a small letter.

Some further explanation is necessary with some of these basic rules, as detailed in the remainder of this section.

21.2.1 Capital letters with nouns and proper names

(a) Other parts of speech used as nouns are written with an initial capital letter

beim Lesen	das Für und Wider	das Ich	das Entweder-Oder
eine Drei	ein Drittel	der Vorsitzende	Bekanntes
alles Gute	nichts Schlechtes		

Some exceptions to this rule under the previous spelling rules have been partly eliminated, and all nouns are now spelled with an initial capital letter, e.g.:

im Allgemeinen *in general* im Großen und Ganzen *in general*

alles Mögliche *everything possible* aufs Neue *afresh*

However, small letters can still be used in some idiomatic expressions which do

not include distinct nouns. In these cases, **adjectives without an ending are always spelled with a small letter:**

durch dick und dünn *through thick and thin* von nah und fern *from near and far*
gegen bar *for cash* über kurz oder lang *sooner or later*
schwarz auf weiß *in black and white* von klein auf *from childhood*

However, **declined adjectives can be spelled with a small or a capital letter:**

binnen kurzem/Kurzem *in a short time* von weitem/Weitem *from afar*
seit langem/Langem *for a long time* bei weitem/Weitem *by far*
ohne weiteres/Weiteres *without thinking*

(b) Adjectives are not spelled with a capital letter if a noun before or after is understood

Das rote Kleid hat mir nicht gepasst, ich musste das **blaue** nehmen

Es ist wohl das **schnellste** von diesen drei Autos

(c) The determiners *ander*, *beide* and *ein* have small letters in most contexts

This applies even in contexts where it would appear that they are being used as nouns, e.g.:

etwas **anderes** diese **beiden** das **eine** und das **andere**

However, *ander* can be used with an initial capital letter if it refers to something or somebody specific:

das Leben der **Anderen** *the life of others*

(d) Usage with geographical and other proper names

(i) Adjectives forming part of geographical or other names referring to something or somebody unique have an initial capital letter:

das Schwarze Meer *the Black Sea* Karl der Erste *Charles the First*

das Neue Testament *the New Testament* die Olympischen Spiele *the Olympic Games*

das Auswärtige Amt *the Foreign Office* der Eiserne Vorhang *the Iron Curtain*

die Französische Revolution *the French Revolution*

However, the following, and others like them, are not names of unique things, and they are spelled with a small letter:

die goldene Hochzeit *golden wedding* der schwarze Markt *the black market*

(ii) Indeclinable adjectives in *-er* from the names of towns and countries have an initial capital:

der Kölner Dom die Berliner Straßen das Wiener Rathaus

(iii) Adjectives formed from proper names with the suffix *-isch* (or *-sch*) normally have a small letter:

die goetheschen Gedichte das elisabethanische Drama das ohmsche Gesetz

These adjectives can be used with an apostrophe after the name to emphasize the person involved, in which case they are written with an initial capital, e.g. *die Grimm'schen Märchen*.

(e) Usage with *deutsch* and other adjectives of nationality

(i) Adjectives of nationality are written with a capital letter when used as a noun to refer to the language or the school subject (see 6.4.6a):

Das ist (kein) gutes

Er kann kein Wort Deutsch
Wir haben Deutsch in der
Schule

Deutsch
Ich habe eine Drei in
Deutsch

auf Deutsch *in*
German

Sie spricht, kann, lernt, liest (kein, gut) Deutsch, Russisch, Englisch

Das Buch ist in Deutsch und Englisch erschienen

As an adjective used as a noun *der/die Deutsche* 'German' is also always spelled with a capital letter.

(ii) When used as adjectives they have a small letter:

das deutsche Volk
italienische Weine

ein deutsches Lied
ein amerikanisches Schiff

die deutsche Bundesrepublik
dieser französische Käse

This runs counter to English usage, which requires a capital letter ('the German people', 'Italian wines', etc.). Only in names is a capital used in German, e.g. *die Österreichischen Bundesbahnen*.

(iii) They have a small letter when used as the equivalent of an adverb:

Der Minister hat mit ihr deutsch gesprochen

Redet sie jetzt deutsch oder niederländisch?

(f) Capital and small letters with superlatives

(i) Superlatives with *am* (see 6.5.3a) are spelled with a small letter:

am besten, am schönsten

(ii) Superlative forms used with the definite article are written with a capital letter, e.g.:

Es ist das Beste, wenn wir ihr alles sagen.

(iii) Superlatives with the preposition *aufs* (see 7.7.2a) can be written with a capital or a small letter:

aufs Heftigste/heftigste

(g) Possessive pronouns with the form of an adjective after a definite article

(see 5.2.1d). These can be spelled with a small or a capital initial letter, e.g.:

der meine/Meine *mine*, der deine/Deine *yours*, der uns(e)re/Uns(e)re *ours*

der meinige/Meinige *mine*, der deinige/Deinige *yours*, der uns(e)rige/Uns(e)rige *ours*

21.2.2 Nouns used as other parts of speech

These are written with a small letter, in particular:

(i) nouns **used as prepositions**, see 18.4, e.g.:

angesichts, kraft, mittels, statt, trotz

(ii) nouns used as adverbs, e.g.:

abends, anfangs, kreuz und quer, mitten, morgens, rechtens, rings, sonntags, teils, willens

Capital letters are used for words denoting a part of the day used in conjunction with *heute*, *gestern* and *morgen*: *gestern Abend*, *heute Mittag*, etc. (see 7.3.2).

(iii) nouns used in **indefinite expressions of number**, e.g.:

ein bisschen *a little* ein paar *a few* (see 5.5.6)

(iv) some **nouns used as adjectives** with the verbs *sein*, *bleiben* and *werden*, i.e.: *Angst*, *Bange*, *Gram*, *Leid*, *Pleite*, *Schade* and *Schuld*:

Mir ist/wird **angst** *I am/am becoming afraid*

Er blieb ihr **gram** *He bore her ill-will*

Die Firma ist **pleite** *The firm is bankrupt*

Es ist **schade** *It's a pity*

Sie war **schuld** daran *It was her fault*

With other verbs, these words have an initial capital letter, e.g. *Ich habe Angst*.

(v) Nouns which have become idiomatic separable prefixes are spelled with a small letter, see 20.6.3, e.g. *stattfinden*, *teilnehmen*.

21.2.3 Pronouns and related forms

All forms of the 'polite' second person pronoun **Sie** are spelled with a capital letter, see [Table 3.1](#), e.g. *Sie*, *Ihnen*, *Ihre Frau*, etc.

The other second person pronouns **du**, **ihr** and their forms may be spelled with small initial letters or capitals in letter-writing, e.g. *Ich danke dir/Dir recht herzlich für deinen/Deinen Brief*.

No other pronouns have initial capital letters (except when they begin a sentence).

21.3 One word or two?

The general rule is that **compounds are written as a single word if they are felt to be a single concept**. On the other hand, where the individual words are still felt to retain full meaning, they are written separately. The word stress often gives a clue to this, as a true compound only has one main stress, whereas separate words are still stressed independently. Compare:

‘gut ‘schreiben *write well* ‘gutschreiben *credit*

‘so ‘weit *so far* so‘weit *on the whole*

This rule has always given rise to uncertainties in borderline cases. Some of these were eliminated in the spelling reform, but others emerged, and after subsequent revisions the ‘old’ and ‘new’ spellings are permitted in a number of cases.

The main principles are explained with examples in this section, except that the spelling of separable and compound verbs, e.g. *Rad fahren*, *kundgeben* is treated in section 20.6.3.

21.3.1 Combinations of preposition + noun

These have the function of adverbs or prepositions and they are written separately if the individual words are still felt to retain independent meanings:

mit Bezug auf, unter Bezug auf zu Ende gehen in/außer Kraft treten, sein

On the other hand, such adverbs or prepositions are written as single words if they are considered to be single entities, in particular:

anhand infolge vonnöten vorderhand zurzeit
beiseite inmitten vonstatten zuhanden zuzeiten

Alternative forms are permitted in some set phrases where it is debatable whether the words involved retain their separate meanings or not:

außerstand/außer Stand setzen, sein

imstande/im Stande sein

infrage/in Frage stellen

instand/in Stand setzen

nachhause/nach Hause gehen

zugrunde/zu Grunde gehen

zu Hause/zu Hause sein

zu Leide/zu Leide tun

zumute/zu Mute sein

zurande/zu Rande kommen

zuschanden/zu Schanden machen, werden

sich etwas zuschulden/zu Schulden kommen lassen

zustande/zu Stande bringen

zutage/zu Tage bringen, fördern

zuwege/zu Wege bringen

Some prepositions from complex phrases with a noun also have alternative spellings:

aufgrund/auf Grund zugunsten/zu Gunsten mithilfe/mit Hilfe anstelle/an Stelle

21.3.2 Nouns or adverbs with a participle or an adjective

Compounds which involve an underlying phrase are written together.

das bahnbrechende Werk (from <i>sich eine Bahn brechend</i>)	<i>the pioneering work</i>
der angsterfüllte alte Mann (from <i>von Angst erfüllt</i>)	<i>the terrified old man</i>
ein himmelschreiendes Unrecht (from <i>zum Himmel schreiend</i>)	<i>an outrageous injustice</i>
die staubbedeckten Bücher (from <i>mit Staub bedeckt</i>)	<i>the books covered with dust</i>

Other combinations of an adjective with a participle can always be written as separate words:

ein Aufsehen erregendes Ereignis die Eisen verarbeitende Industrie

However, it is permissible to write the words together if they are felt to express a single idea, e.g.:

eine allein erziehende/alleinerziehende Mutter

ein klein geschnittenes/kleingeschnittenes Radieschen

selbst gebackene/selbstgebackene Kekse

If the combination is qualified by an adverb of degree (see 7.5), and the qualification relates to the whole combination, then it is written together, e.g.:

eine äußerst kraftraubende Trainingsmethode

21.3.3 Compound adverbs with *so-*, *wie-* and *wo-*

Note the difference between the following pairs (see 17.3.6 for details on the conjunctions in *so-*):

sobald *as soon as* so bald *so soon*

solange *as long as* so lange *so long*

sooft *as often as* so oft *so often*

wieweit? *to what extent?* wie weit? *how far, what distance?*

woanders *elsewhere* (see 7.1.5d) wo anders? *where else?*

womöglich *possibly* wo möglich *if possible*

so dass ‘so that’, see 17.5.2, may alternatively be spelled *sodass*.

Most combinations with *viel* and *wenig* are spelled as separate words, e.g. *so viel*, *wie viel*, *zu wenig*, see 5.5.25e, but when used as a conjunction in the meaning ‘as far as’ *soviel* is written as a single word, see 17.7d.

21.4 Other points of spelling

21.4.1 -ss or -ß?

The distinction between *ss* and *ß* (called *eszett* in North Germany and *scharfes s* in South Germany and Austria) is universally observed in Germany and Austria. In Switzerland, though, no distinction is made and *ss* is used in all cases. Foreign learners are recommended to follow the majority practice.

(a) -ss is used if the preceding vowel is short

da *ss*, der Flu *ss*, die Flü *ss* e, gewi *ss*, la *ss* en, er lä *ss* t,
mü *ss* en, es mu *ss*, wi *ss* en, ich wu *ss* te, das Wa *ss* er

(b) -ß is used if the preceding vowel is long or a diphthong

bei *ß* en, die Bu *ß* e, der Fu *ß*, die Fü *ß* e, gro *ß*, der Gru *ß*, der Ma *ß*, die Ma *ß* e, die Stra *ß* e

The letter *ß* now fits consistently with the rule in German which stipulates that long vowels are followed by a single consonant in the spelling.

Some family names are always spelled with a final -*ss*, but this is very much a matter of individual family tradition e.g.:

Günther Gra *ss*, Theodor Heu *ss*, Richard Strau *ss* (but: Johann Strau *ß*), Carl Zei *ss*

ß was originally only a small letter, but its use as a capital is now permitted, e.g. *BONNER STRAßE*. However, many people still always write -*SS*- in capitals: *STRASSE*.

21.4.2 The omission of letters: special cases

(a) The plural of nouns in -*ee* and -*ie*

These nouns do not add an extra - *e* in the spelling of the plural, even if the plural ending is pronounced as a distinct syllable, e.g.:

der See, die Seen [ze: ən] das Knie, die Knie [kni: ə]

die Industrie, die Industrien [ɪndʊstri: ən]

Similarly in verb forms, see **10.2.1d**:

knien [kni: ən] *kneel* wir schrien [ʃ ri: ən] *we cried*

(b) Double vowels are simplified under *Umlaut*

(i) **in plurals** (see 1.2.1a): der Saal *room* – die Säle

(ii) **in diminutives** (see 20.2.1a): das Paar *pair* – das Pär chen

(c) Letters are not omitted in compounds

The former rule that sequences of three letters should be simplified no longer applies. Thus forms like the following are now standard:

Brennnessel *stinging nettle* Schifffahrt *travel by ship*

Schlusszene *closing scene* Schneeeule *snowy owl*

21.5 Commas

Unlike English, the comma in German is used to mark off grammatical units, **not** to signal a pause when speaking. The rules for using commas are fixed and were modified with spellings in the reforms of 1996. Germans adhere to these rules quite strictly (they are taught systematically in schools), and deviations from them are considered to be as serious as spelling mistakes.

This principle that commas are used to mark off larger syntactic units means that, unlike English, adverbs and adverbial phrases within the sentence are **never** separated by commas. Compare:

Er konnte ihr jedoch helfen *He was, however, able to help her*

Bringen Sie mir bitte eine Zeitung *Bring me a newspaper, please*

21.5.1 The use of commas with coordinated clauses and phrases

i.e. those linked by one of the coordinating conjunctions, like *aber*, *oder* and *und* (see 17.1)

(a) Clauses and phrases joined by *und* or *oder* do not need a comma

Die alte Dame öffnete ihm die Tür und er ging in den Garten

Christa rief an und er erzählte ihr, was passiert war

Ich gehe morgen ins Theater oder besuche ein Konzert

Parallel subordinate clauses linked by *und* or *oder* do not have a comma between them:

Er sagte, dass ich sofort kommen müsste und dass er mir etwas sehr Wichtiges zu berichten hätte

Sie wird nicht kommen, weil sie nicht kann oder weil sie einfach keine Lust hat

However, a comma can be used if the writer feels the need to make the sentence clearer or avoid ambiguity:

Sie begegnete ihrem Trainer, und dessen Mannschaft musste lange auf ihn warten

No comma is necessary before conjunctions with a similar meaning to *oder* and *und*, e.g. *beziehungsweise*, *sowie*, *weder ... noch*, etc. (see 17.1.3 and 17.1.4).

(b) A comma is used before the conjunctions *aber*, *denn*, *doch*, *jedoch* and *sondern*

Er runzelte die Stirn, aber sie sagte nichts

Ich machte Licht, denn es war inzwischen dunkel geworden

Der Lohn ist karg, doch man genießt die abendlichen Stunden

Das Kleid war nicht grün, sondern hellblau

(c) A comma is used between parallel clauses and phrases which have no linking conjunction

Das Licht geht aus, der Vorhang hebt auf, das Spiel beginnt

Berlin, Paris, London, Madrid sind europäische Hauptstädte

21.5.2 The use of commas with subordinate clauses

In principle, all subordinate clauses are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, whether they are introduced by a conjunction or not:

Er fragte, ob ich morgen nach Halberstadt fahren wollte

Weil ich morgen arbeiten muss, werde ich keine Zeit haben

Sie sagte, sie habe diesen Mann nie vorher gesehen

Unsere Lage wäre unmöglich gewesen, hätte er diesen Plan nicht ausgedacht

21.5.3 The use of commas with participial and infinitive clauses

(a) These clauses do not need to be separated by commas from the rest of the sentence

Sie beschloss den Betrag möglichst bald zu überweisen

Ich hoffte in der nächsten Runde zu gewinnen

Diesen Vorgang wollen wir zu erklären versuchen

Ich brauche heute nicht ins Geschäft zu gehen

Aus vollem Halse lachend kam er auf mich zu

Er sank zu Tode getroffen zu Boden

However, a comma can be used if the writer feels the need to make the sense clear or avoid ambiguities, as with the following example, where the comma shows which part of the sentence *heute* belongs to:

Das Kind versprach heute, nichts mehr von dem Kuchen zu essen

Das Kind versprach, heute nichts mehr von dem Kuchen zu essen

(b) A comma is used before an infinitive clause in the following cases

(i) if the infinitive clause is introduced by *(an)statt*, *außer*, *ohne* or *um* (see 11.2.6):

Ich konnte nichts tun, um ihn zu beruhigen

Er verließ das Haus, ohne gesehen zu werden

(ii) if the infinitive clause depends on a noun:

Umsonst machte er einen letzten Versuch, seine Frau zu retten

Ich habe nicht die geringste Absicht, ihr 1000 Euro zu leihen

(iii) if the infinitive clause depends on an anticipatory *es* (see 3.6.2e and 3.6.2f), or a prepositional adverb (see 11.2.2f):

Ich konnte es kaum ertragen, ihn so leiden zu sehen

Sie hat ihn daran erinnert, Blumen für seine Mutter zu kaufen

21.5.4 The use of commas with other parts of speech and phrases

i.e. with interjections, exclamations, explanatory phrases, phrases in apposition and parenthetical words and phrases. If these are seen as separate elements they are normally separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, e.g.:

Ach, kannst du morgen wirklich nicht zu uns kommen?

Kurz und gut, die Lage ist kritisch

Wissen Sie, ich kann Ihnen da leider nicht mehr helfen

Das macht , **grob gerechnet**, vierzig Prozent von unserem Absatz aus

Ich habe jetzt , **wie gesagt**, keine Zeit dazu

Wir wurden durch Herrn Meiring , **den Direktor des Instituts**, aufs Herzlichste empfangen

Comparative phrases introduced by *als* or *wie* are not normally separated off by commas, e.g.:

Sie ist jetzt wohl größer als ihre ältere Schwester

Dieser Mann sah aus wie ein Schornsteinfeger

21.5.5 Commas with a number of adjectives qualifying a noun

Two or more adjectives qualifying a noun are separated by commas if they are of equal importance, i.e. if they could be linked by *und*, e.g.:

gute, billige Äpfel (*the apples are good and cheap*)

No comma is used if the second adjective forms a single idea with the noun:

gute englische Äpfel (*i.e. English apples which are good*)

In practice, this rule is not always followed consistently (any more than the similar rule in English is), and many German writers use no commas in any series of adjectives.

21.6 Other punctuation marks

German usage differs from English in respect of the use of some other punctuation marks.

21.6.1 The semi-colon is little used in German

In principle, the semi-colon is used as in English. However, a comma or full stop, as appropriate, tends to be preferred in German. In particular, it is much more common in German than in English to have main clauses not linked by a conjunction, and these are commonly separated by commas:

Geh in die Stadt und kaufe Mehl, unterdessen heize ich schon den Ofen an

21.6.2 A colon is used to introduce direct speech

This means that a colon is used rather than a comma after a verb of saying:

Dann sagte sie: „Ich kann es nicht“

Similarly with reported phrases and the like:

Das Sprichwort heißt: Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm

When a colon introduces a full sentence, it is usually followed by a capital letter, but a small letter is now permitted: *Das Sprichwort heißt: der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.*

21.6.3 Quotation marks

The first of a set of inverted commas is placed on the line, i.e. not above it as in English. This applies equally to single and double quotation marks:

Dann sagte sie: „Ich kann ihn überhaupt nicht verstehen“.

Er fragte mich: „Kennen Sie Brechts Stück, Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder’?“

In practice, double rather than single quotation marks are always preferred in German.

As placing inverted commas on the line was sometimes difficult with conventional typewriters, it became common for a while to place them above, and this remains the case with some less sophisticated e-mail programs. On the other hand, modern word-processing programs normally standardize on the traditional German placing.

21.6.4 The exclamation mark

(a) The exclamation mark is used after interjections and exclamations

Ach!	Donnerwetter!	Pfui Teufel!	Guten Tag!
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(b) Commands are followed by an exclamation mark

Komm sofort zurück!	Hören Sie sofort auf!
Seid doch vorsichtig, Kinder!	Einsteigen und die Türen schließen!

Standard usage traditionally required the use of the exclamation mark with commands in German, but this rule is not always followed nowadays, and many Germans prefer to use a full stop, especially if the command is not felt to be particularly forceful.

(c) An exclamation mark can be used after the words of address at the beginning of a letter

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Fleischmann! Liebe Petra!

This traditional usage has now largely been replaced by the use of the comma, as

in English. However, **if a comma is used, a capital letter should not be used** for the first word of the letter proper, as, strictly speaking, it is not the beginning of a sentence, e.g.:

Lieber Martin,

es hat uns sehr gefreut, wieder mal von dir zu hören ...

List of sources

The examples illustrating points of grammar and usage have been drawn from a wide range of sources and registers, spoken as well as written. Many of the unattributed examples which are new to this revised edition have been simplified or amended from modern texts, from phrases and sentences heard in conversation or on radio and television, etc. and in large number from the DeReKo corpus of modern spoken and written German compiled at the Institut für Deutsche Sprache in Mannheim (www.ids-mannheim.de). Longer examples quoted verbatim or with minor simplifications have been attributed wherever possible. The following sources have provided such material:

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S. Andres	M.L. Fleißer	U. Johnson	A. Seghers
R. Augstein	M. Frisch	E. Jünger	K. Sonnenberg
I. Bachmann	G. Gaiser	G. Kapp	E. Strittmatter
B. Balden	A. Goes	F.X. Kroetz	A. Surminski
V. Baum	G. Grass	E. Langgässer	P. Süßkind
K. Bednarz	M. von der Grün	Th. Mann	Th. Valentin
W. Bergengruen	B. Grzimek	I. Morgner	M. Walser
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H. Böll	E.W. Heine	R. Musil	C. Weyden
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B. Brecht	S. Heym	E.M. Remarque	E. Wiechert
S. Brinkmann	P. Heyse	G. Reuter	G. Wohmann

J. Bumke	W. Hildesheimer	H. von Rimscha	C. Wolf
M. Dönhoff	M. Horbach	H.G.F. Schneeweiß	S. Zweig
F. Dürrenmatt	E.H. Jacob	P. Schneider	G. Zwerenz

Newspapers

The following newspapers or periodicals have provided material. Some titles have been abbreviated as indicated:

BILD	<i>BILD-Zeitung</i>	ND	<i>Neues Deutschland</i>
BZ	<i>Berliner Zeitung</i>	NZZ	<i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i>
BrZ	<i>Braunschweiger Zeitung</i>	NüN	<i>Nürnberger Nachrichten</i>
FAZ	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	NUZ	<i>Nürnberger Zeitung</i>
	<i>forum</i>	OH	<i>Odenwälder Heimatzeitung</i>
	<i>FOCUS</i>		<i>(Die) Presse</i>
FR	<i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i>		<i>Quick</i>
HA	<i>Hamburger Abendblatt</i>	RhZ	<i>Rhein-Zeitung</i>
HMP	<i>Hamburger Morgenpost</i>	SGT	<i>Sankt Galler Tagblatt</i>
HAZ	<i>Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung</i>		<i>(Der) Spiegel</i>
	<i>Horizont</i>		<i>(Der) Standard</i>
KlZ	<i>Kleine Zeitung</i>		<i>Stern</i>
	<i>Kurier</i>	SZ	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>
LV	<i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i>		<i>(Die) Welt</i>
Lux	<i>Luxemburger Tageblatt</i>		<i>(Die) Zeit</i>
MM	<i>Mannheimer Morgen</i>		

In addition, the Baedeker series of travel guides, Knaur's encyclopedia, and Innsbruck university *Vorlesungsverzeichnis* have provided examples, as well as the radio and television stations ARD and SWF.

Bibliography and references

This list gives a selection of the most important works which were consulted for this and previous revisions of *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage*. Major dictionaries and general accounts of German and English grammar are given first, followed by a selection of works containing more extensive accounts of specific points of grammar and usage, arranged according to the individual chapters of this book.

In principle, the entries are limited to major reference books on each topic; users requiring more detailed information, especially in journals and collected volumes, are referred to: H. Frosch et al., *Bibliographie zur deutschen Grammatik 1994–2002* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2003), *Bibliographie zur deutschen Grammatik 2003–2007* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2008) and *Bibliographie zur deutschen Grammatik 2008–2012* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2013). Details of these and more recent work on German grammar are available online through the *grammis* website of the *Institut für Deutsche Sprache* in Mannheim (<http://hypermedia.ids-mannheim.de/call/public/bib.ansicht>).

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Glossary

One of the perennial difficulties about grammar and language is the confusion caused by the fact that the same feature is often known by a number of names – and this problem can be compounded by the fact that what appears to be the same name can refer to quite different features in other languages and national traditions. Thus what are called in this book the ‘progressive tenses’ of English (e.g. *I am doing, she will be working*) are sometimes called ‘continuous tenses’, and the German ‘past tense’ has often been labelled the ‘imperfect tense’ or the ‘preterite’.

In order to address this difficulty the English terminology in this book has been standardized as far as possible by adopting the recommendations of the Linguistic Association of Great Britain, which can be downloaded at <http://lagb-education.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/terminology-9-clean.pdf>, with further reference to R.L. Trask, *A Dictionary of Grammatical Terms in Linguistics*, Routledge: London and New York 1993. On the suggestion of a kind correspondent the most usual German equivalents for all terms are given in italics under the English entry; these have been taken in the main from the most recent edition of the DUDEN *Grammatik der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*, 8th ed., Dudenverlag: Mannheim, Wien, Zürich 2009, augmented by consultation with other works.

The explanations include references to sections or chapters where more detail is given. Words in small capitals are themselves explained in the glossary.

accusative
Akkusativ/Wenfall

a CASE (2.2) which indicates the DIRECT OBJECT of TRANSITIVE verbs (16.3): *Ich sehe **den Hund***. It is also used after some PREPOSITIONS (18.1, 18.3): *Ich gehe durch **den Wald***, as well as in some ADVERBIAL constructions (2.2.2):

Sie kommt jeden Tag.

accusative object <i>Akkusativobjekt</i>	the DIRECT OBJECT of the verb, in the ACCUSATIVE case (16.3): <i>Der Wolf frisst den Esel.</i>
adjective <i>Adjektiv</i>	a word which modifies, or describes a NOUN (Chapter 6). Attributive adjectives are used before a noun: <i>die schöne Stadt</i> ; predicative adjectives are typically used after a COPULAR VERB (16.6): <i>Die Stadt ist schön.</i>
adverb <i>Adverb</i>	a word which modifies a VERB, an ADJECTIVE or a whole CLAUSE, often giving extra information on how , when , where or why (Chapter 7): <i>Sie singt gut</i> ; <i>Sie war sehr freundlich.</i>
adverbial <i>Adverbiale/freie Angaben</i>	any part of a SENTENCE which has the function of an ADVERB (16.1.4). It can be a single word (an adverb), or a phrase, or a whole CLAUSE: <i>Sie sang gut</i> ; <i>Sie sang mit einer hellen Stimme</i> ; <i>Sie sang, als sie in das Zimmer kam.</i>
agreement <i>Kongruenz</i>	copying a grammatical feature from one word to another, so that certain words have ENDINGS according to the words they are used with or refer to. In German, DETERMINERS and ADJECTIVES ‘agree’ with the NOUN (4.1, 6.1): <i>dieses Buch</i> ; <i>mit meinem neuen Auto</i> , and VERBS ‘agree’ with their SUBJECT (10.1.4): <i>ich singe</i> , <i>du singst</i> .
apposition <i>Apposition</i>	a phrase used to modify a NOUN PHRASE without a connecting PREPOSITION is ‘ in apposition ’ to it (2.6): <i>Wilhelm, der letzte deutsche Kaiser, starb im Exil.</i>
article <i>Artikel</i>	the most important of the DETERMINERS (Chapter 4). German has a definite article <i>der, die, das</i> , etc. (= English <i>the</i>) and an indefinite article <i>ein, eine</i> , etc. (= English <i>a</i>).
auxiliary verb <i>Hilfsverb</i>	a VERB used in combination with the INFINITIVE or PAST PARTICIPLE of another verb to form a COMPOUND TENSE or the PASSIVE (10.3–10.4): <i>Karin hat einen Hund gekauft</i> , or, in the case of the MODAL AUXILIARIES (Chapter 15), to indicate the attitude of the speaker with regard to what is being said: <i>Sie soll sofort kommen.</i>

bracket <i>Verbalklammer/ Satzklammer</i>	the ‘ bracket ’ construction is typical of German CLAUSES, with most words and phrases in a clause bracketed between two parts of the verb (19.1): <i>Wir [kommen um 17 Uhr in Innsbruck an].</i>
cardinal number <i>Kardinalzahl</i>	the numerals used in counting (8.1): eins, zwei, ... hundert.
case <i>Fall/ Kasus</i>	indicates the function of a NOUN PHRASE in the CLAUSE (Chapter 2). German has four cases : NOMINATIVE der Igel ; ACCUSATIVE den Igel ; GENITIVE des Igels and DATIVE dem Igel .
clause <i>Satz</i>	a part of a SENTENCE with a VERB and its COMPLEMENTS (16.1). A main clause can stand on its own: Dein Vater kommt. A subordinate clause (Chapter 17) is dependent on another clause in the sentence and is usually introduced by a CONJUNCTION: <i>Ich weiß, dass dein Vater kommt.</i>
comparative <i>Komparativ/Steigerung</i>	the form of an ADJECTIVE (6.5) or ADVERB (7.7) used to express a comparison: schneller, höher, weiter.
complement <i>Ergänzung/ Komplement</i>	an element in a CLAUSE which is closely linked to the VERB and completes its meaning (16.1). The most important complements of the verb are its SUBJECT and OBJECTS.
complement clause <i>Ergänzungs(neben)satz</i>	a subordinate CLAUSE which has the same role as a verb COMPLEMENT (17.2): Dass sie gekommen war , <i>hat mich erstaunt</i> (the clause is the SUBJECT of the verb); <i>Ich wusste, dass sie gekommen war</i> (the clause is the DIRECT OBJECT of the verb).
compound tense <i>zusammengesetzte/ mehrteilige Verbform</i>	a TENSE formed by using an AUXILIARY VERB with the INFINITIVE or PAST PARTICIPLE of another verb (10.3), e.g. the PERFECT tense: <i>Sie hat geschlafen</i> , or the FUTURE tense: <i>Sie wird kommen.</i>
compound word <i>Kompositum</i>	a word formed by joining two or more words (20.1): Kindergarten, dunkelrot.
conditional <i>würde-Form</i>	a compound form of KONJUNKTIV II formed from the past subjunctive form of the AUXILIARY VERB <i>werden</i> , i.e. würde , and the INFINITIVE of another verb (10.5.2c,

14.2.3): *Ich würde gehen.*

conditional sentence <i>Konditionalsatz</i>	a SENTENCE which expresses a condition, i.e. ‘If X, then Y’ (14.3). The SUBJUNCTIVE mood is often used in conditional sentences in German.
conjugation <i>Konjugation/ Verbflexion</i>	the forms or INFLECTION of a VERB, in particular the pattern of ENDINGS and/or vowel changes which show AGREEMENT with the SUBJECT and indicate the various TENSES or the MOOD, etc. (Chapter 10): <i>ich komme, du kommst, wir kamen, wir kämen</i> , etc.
conjunction <i>Konjunktion</i>	a word used to link CLAUSES within a SENTENCE (Chapter 17). Coordinating conjunctions link main clauses (e.g. und, aber), and subordinating conjunctions introduce subordinate clauses (e.g. dass, obwohl, weil, wenn).
copular verb <i>Kopulaverb</i>	a linking VERB, which typically links the SUBJECT with a PREDICATE COMPLEMENT, i.e. an ADJECTIVE or a NOUN PHRASE in the NOMINATIVE case (16.6). The most frequent copular verbs in German are sein, werden and scheinen : <i>Er ist ein guter Lehrer, Die alte Frau wurde blass.</i>
count noun <i>zählbares Substantiv</i>	a NOUN referring to a thing or object which can be counted. Count nouns, unlike MASS NOUNS, can be used in the PLURAL and with the indefinite ARTICLE.
dative <i>Dativ/Wemfall</i>	a CASE (2.5) used to mark some OBJECTS of the VERB: <i>Sie hat meiner Schwester die CD gegeben, Ich helfe meinem Bruder.</i> It can also indicate possession : <i>Sie zog dem Kind die Jacke aus</i> , it is used after some ADJECTIVES (6.3.1): <i>Er sieht meinem Vater ähnlich</i> , and after many PREPOSITIONS (18.2–18.3): <i>Er hat mit den Kindern gespielt.</i>
dative object <i>Dativobjekt</i>	a COMPLEMENT of the VERB in the DATIVE case (16.4). With some verbs it is the only object: <i>Sie wollte dem kleinen Mädchen helfen</i> ; with verbs which also have an ACCUSATIVE (DIRECT) OBJECT, it is the INDIRECT OBJECT: <i>Sie hat dem kleinen Mädchen das Heft gegeben.</i>
declension <i>Deklination/Flexion</i>	the pattern of ENDINGS (the ‘INFLECTION’) of a NOUN (1.3), an ADJECTIVE (6.1), or a DETERMINER (4.1, Chapter 5) which show CASE, NUMBER and GENDER: der gute Hund, des

	guten Hundes, den guten Hunden.
demonstrative <i>Demonstrativ</i>	a DETERMINER or PRONOUN (5.1) which points to something specific, e.g. dieser, jener .
derivation <i>Derivation/ Wortbildung</i>	forming words from other words, typically by using SUFFIXES and/or PREFIXES (Chapter 20): be glaub igen (< <i>Glaube</i>), Gesund heit (< <i>gesund</i>).
determiner <i>Artikelwort</i>	a function word used with NOUNS (Chapters 4 and 5). Determiners include the ARTICLES (der, ein), the DEMONSTRATIVES (dieser , etc.), the POSSESSIVES, (mein , etc.) and INDEFINITES (einige, viele , etc.). They typically come before ADJECTIVES in the NOUN PHRASE.
direct object <i>direktes Objekt</i>	a verb COMPLEMENT, typically a person or thing directly affected by the action (16.3). It is in the ACCUSATIVE case. <i>Der Löwe fraß den Esel; Die böse Frau schlug den Hund.</i>
direction complement <i>Direktivergänzung</i>	a LOCATIVE COMPLEMENT used with verbs of motion , indicating where the SUBJECT is going or where the DIRECT OBJECT is being put (16.8): <i>Sie fuhr nach Ulm; Er stellt den Besen in die Ecke.</i>
ending <i>Endung/Flexiv</i>	a SUFFIX which gives grammatical information, e.g. about CASE, NUMBER or TENSE. All the endings of a NOUN, ADJECTIVE or DETERMINER make up its DECLENSION; all the endings of a VERB make up its CONJUGATION.
feminine <i>Femininum</i>	one of the three GENDERS into which nouns are classified (1.1), shown by the INFLECTION of the DETERMINER or ADJECTIVE in the NOUN PHRASE.
finite verb <i>finites Verb</i>	a form of the VERB which has an ENDING in agreement with the SUBJECT (10.1): <i>Ich komme; Wir haben geschlafen; Sie wurden betrogen; Ihr könnt gehen.</i>
future tense <i>Futur/Futur I</i>	a TENSE formed with the auxiliary VERB werden and an INFINITIVE (10.3), and used to refer to future time or express a supposition (12.3): <i>Ich werde das Buch nicht lesen.</i>
future perfect <i>Futurperfekt/Futur II</i>	a tense formed with the AUXILIARY VERB werden and a compound INFINITIVE (10.3), used to refer to an action or event which will occur before another in the future, or to a supposition about a past event: <i>Sie wird das Buch</i>

	gelesen haben (12.3).
gender <i>Genus</i>	the division of nouns into three classes in German, called MASCULINE, FEMININE and NEUTER (1.1). The gender of a noun is shown by the ENDINGS of the DETERMINER or ADJECTIVE in the NOUN PHRASE: der Mann, diese Frau, klares Wasser.
genitive <i>Genitiv/Wesfall</i>	a CASE which is mainly used to show possession or to link NOUNS together (2.3): <i>das Buch meines Vaters; die Geschichte dieser Stadt.</i> A few verbs have a genitive OBJECT (16.7), and it is used after a few PREPOSITIONS (see 18.4): <i>trotz des Wetters.</i>
imperative <i>Imperativ</i>	a MOOD of the VERB used to give commands or instructions, or to make a request (14.1): Komm hierher! Seid vorsichtig! Steigen Sie bitte ein!
indefinite <i>indefinites Pronomen, indefinites Artikelwort</i>	an indefinite PRONOUN or DETERMINER is one which does not refer to a specific person or thing (5.5): etwas, jemand, irgendwelcher.
indicative <i>Indikativ</i>	the most usual MOOD of the VERB, used to make statements or ask questions (Chapter 14): <i>Sie kam gestern. Siehst du das Licht?</i>
indirect object <i>indirektes Objekt</i>	a verb COMPLEMENT, typically a person indirectly affected by the action expressed by the VERB, especially someone who is being given something or benefiting from the action (16.4.1). It is in the DATIVE case: <i>Sie gab ihrem Vater das Geld.</i>
indirect speech <i>indirekte Rede</i>	a construction by which what was said is incorporated into a sentence rather than given in the speaker's original words (14.4). Compare 'direct speech' <i>Er sagte: „Ich bin heute krank“</i> with the corresponding 'indirect speech': <i>Er sagte, dass er heute krank sei.</i>
infinitive <i>Infinitiv</i>	the basic form of a verb, ending in - en or - n (10.1–10.2, 11.1–11.4): kommen, betteln, tun . It is the form of the verb given in dictionaries.
infinitive clause	a subordinate clause containing an infinitive, typically

<i>Infinitivsatz</i>	with the particle zu (11.2): <i>Sie hat mir geraten nach Hause zu gehen .</i>
inflection <i>Flexion/Beugung</i>	changing the form of words, most often by endings, to indicate some grammatical idea, like case or tense. The inflection of nouns, adjectives and determiners is called declension, while the inflection of verbs is called conjugation.
inseparable verb <i>untrennbares Verb</i>	a prefixed verb whose prefix is not stressed and always remains attached to the verb (10.2.1, 20.5): besuchen , erwarten , verstehen .
interrogative <i>interrogativ</i>	interrogative determiners, adverbs or pronouns (5.3, 7.6) are used to ask a question: Welches Hemd kaufst du? Warum geht er nicht? Wem sagst du das?
intransitive verb <i>intransitives Verb</i>	a verb is intransitive if it does not have an accusative (direct) object (16.3): <i>Wir schwimmen ; Dort stand er und wartete auf Luise; Meine Schwester hilft mir.</i>
irregular verb <i>unregelmäßiges Verb</i>	a verb with a conjugation which does not follow the pattern of the weak verbs or the strong verbs (10.1–10.2, 10.6): wissen – ich weiß – ich wusste – gewusst .
locative complement <i>Lokativergänzung</i>	a verb complement (16.8) involving location, in particular one indicating direction or destination with verbs of movement (the direction complement) or place with verbs referring to position (the place complement).
masculine <i>Maskulinum</i>	one of the three genders into which nouns are divided (1.1), shown by the inflection of the determiner or adjective in the noun phrase.
mass noun <i>Stoffsubstantiv/ Stoffname</i>	a noun referring to an indivisible entity, typically a substance or an abstract idea: das Gold , der Frieden . Mass nouns, unlike count nouns, are not used with the indefinite article or in the plural.
modal auxiliaries <i>Modalverb</i>	the verbs dürfen , können , mögen , müssen , sollen and wollen , which indicate the attitude of the speaker with regard to what is being said (Chapter 15). They are highly irregular (10.2.2), and as auxiliary verbs they are normally only used with the infinitive of another verb (11.3): <i>Sie darf spielen ; Ich musste gehen ; Du sollst</i>

	<i>das Fenster aufmachen .</i>
modal particle <i>Modalpartikel</i>	a small word which indicates the speaker's attitude to what is being said (Chapter 9): <i>Es gibt ja hier nur zwei gute Restaurants</i> (assuming agreement), <i>Das Bier ist aber kalt!</i> (surprise).
mood <i>Modus</i>	forms of the verb which indicate the speaker's attitude (Chapter 14). German has three moods : indicative (neutral, factual): <i>Er geht nach Hause</i> ; imperative (commands, requests): <i>Geh nach Hause!</i> and subjunctive (possibly not factual): <i>Wenn er nach Hause ginge,...</i>
neuter <i>Neutrum</i>	one of the three genders into which nouns are divided (1.1), shown by the inflection of the determiner or adjective in the noun phrase.
nominative <i>Nominativ/Werfall</i>	a case (2.1) which most often indicates the subject of a verb (16.2): <i>Du lügst</i> ; <i>Der Hund bellt</i> . It is also used in the predicate complement of copular verbs (16.6): <i>Ich bin der neue Lehrer</i> , or when a word occurs in isolation (i.e. not as part of a full sentence).
non-finite <i>infinite Verbform</i>	a form of the verb which does not have an ending in agreement with the subject (10.1–10.2), i.e. the infinitive and the participles.
noun <i>Substantiv/Nomen</i>	a type of word which typically refers to a person, a living being, a thing, a place or an idea and can normally be used with a definite article: <i>der Tisch , die Idee, das Pferd</i> . German nouns are all classified into one of three genders.
noun phrase <i>Nominalgruppe/ Nominalphrase</i>	A set of words which consists of at least one noun or pronoun and any other words accompanying it, i.e. a determiner and/or an adjective: <i>Brot , weißes Brot , das weiße Brot .</i>
number <i>Numerus</i>	the grammatical distinction between singular and plural.
object <i>Objekt</i>	certain complements of the verb are known as its objects (Chapter 16), i.e. the direct object, the indirect object and the prepositional object.
ordinal number	the form of a numeral used as an adjective: <i>sein</i>

<i>Ordinalzahl</i>	<i>zwanzigster Geburtstag (8.2).</i>
participle <i>Partizip</i>	non-finite forms of the verb (10.1–10.2, 11.5) which are used as adjectives or to form the compound tenses. German has two participles : the present participle, e.g. <i>spielend</i> , and the past participle, e.g. <i>gespielt</i> .
passive (voice) <i>Passiv</i>	a form of a verb where the doer of the action is not necessarily mentioned and the subject is typically a person or thing to which something happens (10.4, Chapter 13): German has two passive constructions, using the auxiliary verbs <i>werden</i> or <i>sein</i> and the past participle: <i>Die Schlange wurde (von dem Jäger) getötet</i> ; <i>Die Stadt war zerstört</i> . The passive voice contrasts with the (more frequent) active voice : <i>Der Jäger tötet die Schlange</i> .
past tense <i>Präteritum</i>	the simple (i.e. one-word) tense (10.2) used to relate an action, state or event in the past (12.2): <i>Ich kam an; Sie sah mich</i> .
past participle <i>Partizip II</i>	a non-finite form of the verb, typically with the prefix <i>ge-</i> and the ending <i>-t</i> with weak verbs or <i>-en</i> with strong verbs (10.1–10.2): <i>gekauft</i> ; <i>gekommen</i> . It is most often used to form compound tenses (10.3), or as an adjective (11.5).
perfect tense <i>Perfekt</i>	a compound tense formed with the present tense of the auxiliary verb <i>haben</i> or <i>sein</i> and the past participle (10.3). It is used to link a past action, state or event to the present, or (especially in spoken German) to relate an action, state or event in the past (12.2): <i>Ich habe sie gesehen</i> ; <i>Sie sind gekommen</i> .
person <i>Person</i>	a grammatical category indicating the person speaking, i.e. the ‘ first ’ person: <i>ich</i> , <i>wir</i> ; the person addressed, i.e. the ‘ second ’ person: <i>du</i> , <i>ihr</i> , <i>Sie</i> ; or other persons or things, i.e. the ‘ third ’ person: <i>er</i> , <i>sie</i> , <i>es</i> (Chapter 3). The finite verb has endings in agreement with the person and number of its subject (10.1).
personal pronoun	simple words standing for the various persons or referring to a noun phrase (Chapter 3): <i>ich</i> , <i>mich</i> , <i>mir</i> ,

Personalpronomen

du , sie , etc.

place complement
Lokativergänzung

a locative complement with verbs referring to **position**, indicating **where** something is situated (16.8): *Die Flasche **steht auf dem Tisch** ; Ich **wohne in Berlin** .*

pluperfect tense
Plusquamperfekt

a compound tense formed with the past tense forms of the auxiliary verb **haben** or **sein** and the past participle (10.3), and used in the context of a statement in the past tense to relate an action, state or event in the more distant past (12.4): *Ich **hatte sie gesehen** ; Sie **waren gekommen** .*

plural
Plural/Mehrzahl

a grammatical term referring to **more than one** person or thing, whereas singular refers to just one. German nouns have special endings to show the **plural** (1.2).

possessive
*Possessivpronomen,
possessives Artikelwort*

a word used to indicate **possession** (5.2), either as a determiner: ***sein Fahrrad*** , or as a pronoun: ***das ist meines*** .

predicate complement
Prädikativergänzung

the typical verb complement with a copular verb, normally an adjective or a noun phrase in the nominative case which describes the subject (16.6): *Mein neuer BMW **ist rot** ; Er **wird bestimmt ein guter Tennisspieler** .*

prefix
Präfix

an element added to the beginning of a word to form another word ([Chapter 20](#)): ***Ur** wald, **un** glücklich, **ver** bessern, **weg** gehen.*

preposition
Präposition

a word used to introduce a noun phrase and typically indicating position, direction, time, etc. ([Chapter 18](#)): ***an** , **auf** , **aus** , **neben** , **ohne** , etc.* All German **prepositions** are followed by a noun phrase in a particular case: *Er kam **ohne seinen Hund** (acc.); Er kam **mit seinem Hund** (dat.); Er kam **wegen seines Hundes** (gen.).*

prepositional adverb
*Präpositionaladverb/
Pronominaladverb*

a compound of **da (r)**- with a preposition, typically used as a pronoun referring to things (3.5, 16.5.14): ***darauf** ‘on it’, ‘on them’, **damit** ‘with it’, ‘with them’.*

a complement of the verb introduced by a preposition

prepositional object <i>Präpositionalobjekt</i>	(16.5). Typically, the preposition does not have its usual full meaning, and the choice of preposition depends on the individual verb : <i>Wir warten auf meine Mutter</i> ; <i>Sie warnte mich vor dem großen Hund</i> .
prepositional phrase <i>Präpositionalphrase</i>	the combination of a noun phrase with a preposition: an diesem Tag , aus dem Haus, zwischen den Häusern .
present participle <i>Partizip I</i>	a non-finite form of the verb, formed by adding the suffix - d to the infinitive (10.1–10.2): leidend , schlafend . It is used most often as an adjective (11.5): <i>das schlafende Kind</i> .
present tense <i>Präsens</i>	the simple tense (10.2) used to relate something going on at the moment of speaking, or which takes place regularly or repeatedly (12.1): <i>Jetzt kommt sie</i> ; <i>In Irland regnet es viel</i> .
principal parts <i>Stammformen</i>	the three main forms in the conjugation of a verb, i.e. the infinitive, the past tense and the past participle (10.1–10.2): machen – machte – gemacht (weak verb); kommen – kam – gekommen (strong verb). The other forms of most verbs are constructed on the basis of these three forms.
progressive tense <i>Verlaufsform</i>	a tense referring to an action in progress, like the English tenses with the verb <i>to be</i> and the ‘ ing ’-form, e.g. <i>She is reading</i> ; <i>Have you been waiting?</i> (12.5). There are no comparable tenses in German.
pronoun <i>Pronomen</i>	typically a little word which stands for a whole noun phrase already known from the context, e.g. personal pronouns (Chapter 3), e.g. ich , mich , sie ; demonstrative pronouns (5.1), e.g. dieser ; possessive pronouns (5.2), e.g. meiner , seines ; indefinite pronouns (5.5), e.g. man , niemand .
reflexive pronoun <i>Reflexivpronomen</i>	a pronoun in the accusative or dative case referring back to the subject of the verb (3.2). In the third person there is a special form for the reflexive pronoun, sich . For the other persons the personal pronouns are used as reflexive pronouns: <i>Sie wäscht sich</i> ; <i>Ich habe es mir so vorgestellt</i> .

reflexive verb <i>reflexives Verb</i>	a verb used in combination with a reflexive pronoun (16.3.5): sich erinnern (remember), sich weigern (refuse).
register <i>Register</i>	differences of usage linked to different situations and addressees , typically associated with degrees of formality/informality, as found, for example, in differences between spoken and written language.
relative clause <i>Relativsatz</i>	a subordinate clause used in the function of an adjective to describe a noun: <i>der Mann, der dort spielt</i> . Relative clauses are introduced by a relative pronoun (5.4).
relative pronoun <i>Relativpronomen</i>	a pronoun which, like English ‘who’, ‘which’ or ‘that’, is used to introduce a relative clause: (5.4): <i>der Mann, den ich begrüßt hatte; die Männer, denen ich helfen konnte</i> .
root <i>Stamm</i>	the base form of a word, without endings, prefixes or suffixes: <i>wiederkommen, arbeit en, uninteressant</i> .
sentence <i>Satz</i>	the longest unit of grammar, ending with a full stop in writing. It must have at least one main clause: <i>Else hat mir geantwortet</i> , and the main clause(s) can have one or more dependent subordinate clauses : <i>Else hat mir geantwortet, dass Sie nicht nach New York gehen wollte</i> .
sentence pattern <i>Satzbauplan</i>	a limited number of combinations of complements occur commonly with German verbs, since many verbs have the same valency. Such combinations are known as sentence patterns (16.1.3).
separable verb <i>trennbares Verb</i>	a verb with a stressed prefix which detaches from the finite verb in main clauses and is placed at the end of the clause (10.2.1, 20.6), e.g. an kommen: <i>Wir kommen morgen um vierzehn Uhr in Dresden an</i> .
singular <i>Singular/Einzahl</i>	a grammatical term referring to one person or thing, whereas plural refers to more than one. The pronouns ich , du , es and the nouns der kleine Hund or das Kind are singular .
stress <i>Betonung</i>	as in English, one syllable in all German words of more than one syllable is pronounced with rather more force than the others, and this syllable is said to be stressed or bear the stress (21.1.6).

strong adjective declension <i>starke Adjektivflexion</i>	a set of endings used with adjectives which are like the endings of the definite article or <i>dieser</i> (6.1). They are used when there is no determiner in the noun phrase, or when the determiner has no ending of its own: <i>starkes Bier, mein alter Freund.</i>
strong verb <i>starkes Verb</i>	a verb which changes its vowel in the past tense (and often in the past participle, too), and has the ending -en in the past participle (10.1.2, 10.2.1): <i>bitten – bat – gebeten.</i>
subject <i>Subjekt</i>	the noun phrase in the nominative case with which the finite verb agrees for person and number (10.1.4, 16.2): <i>Du kommst morgen; Die Leute beschwerten sich über die Preise.</i> Typically it is the person or thing carrying out the action expressed by the verb.
subjunctive <i>Konjunktiv</i>	a mood of the verb typically used to indicate that an action, event or state may not be factual (14.2–14.5). There are two forms of the subjunctive in German (10.5): <i>Konjunktiv I</i> is chiefly used to mark indirect speech (14.4): <i>Sie sagte, er sei nicht gekommen</i> and <i>Konjunktiv II</i> indicates unreal conditions (14.3): <i>Ich würde lachen, wenn sie käme.</i>
suffix <i>Suffix</i>	an element added to the end of a word or root to form a new word by derivation (Chapter 20): <i>freundlich</i> , <i>Freundlichkeit</i> or, as an inflection in the form of an ending, to give grammatical information: <i>Kinder</i> , <i>machte</i> .
superlative <i>Superlativ</i>	the form of an adjective (6.5) or adverb (7.7) which expresses the highest degree of comparison: <i>der höchste Baum, das Auto fährt am schnellsten.</i>
tense <i>Tempus/Zeitform</i>	a form of the verb which indicates the time of an action, event or state in relation to the moment of speaking (Chapter 12). German has simple tenses , of one word (10.2): present <i>ich warte</i> ; past <i>ich wartete</i> and compound tenses (10.3): future <i>ich werde warten</i> ; perfect <i>ich habe gewartet</i> ; pluperfect <i>ich hatte gewartet</i> ; future perfect <i>ich werde gewartet haben.</i>

topic <i>Topik/Thema</i>	the first element in a main clause, before the finite verb (19.2): Max ist gestern nach Rom gefahren; Gestern ist Max nach Rom gefahren; Nach Rom ist Max gestern gefahren. It is typically something we begin the sentence with because we want to say something about it.
transitive verb <i>transitives Verb</i>	transitive verbs are those which have a direct object in the accusative case (16.3): Sie sah mich ; Ich grüßte meinen Freund ; Meine Schwester kauft die Bücher .
valency/valence <i>Valenz</i>	the construction used with a particular verb, i.e. the number and type of complements which it may have to form a grammatical clause or sentence (Chapter 16).
verb <i>Verb</i>	a type of word which refers to an action, event, process or state: schlagen , passieren , recyclen , schlafen .
weak adjective declension <i>schwache Adjektivflexion</i>	a set of endings used with adjectives when there is a determiner with its own ending preceding it in the noun phrase (6.1): das starke Bier , die jungen Frauen .
weak masculine noun <i>schwaches Maskulinum</i>	one of a small number of masculine nouns which have the ending -(e)n in the accusative, genitive and dative cases in the singular as well as in the plural (1.3.2): der Affe , den Affen , des Affen , dem Affen , die Affen , etc.
weak verb <i>schwaches Verb</i>	the regular verbs of German, which form their past tense with the ending - te and their past participle with the ending - t (10.1.2, 10.2.1): machen – machte – gemacht

Index

The index lists all the German and English words and the grammatical topics about which specific information is given in this book. However, individual words in lists illustrating points of grammar are not included. To facilitate finding particular entries, German words are given in regular type, English words in *italics* and grammatical topics in SMALL CAPITALS (with any German terms *ITALICISED*). Main entries are indicated in bold type.

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zwingen **Table 10.23**
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